

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 30 : Number One : Spring 2009

Strong Medicine

Ignatius on Wholeness

Collaborative Spiritual Direction

The Founding Vision

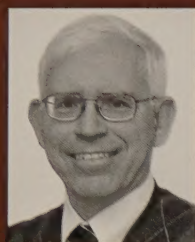
Greening the Spirit

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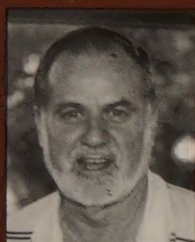
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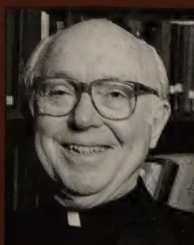
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JAMES J. GILL, S.J., M.D., a priest and psychiatrist, died peacefully on July 29, 2003, after a courageous battle with prostate and bone cancer.

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INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

The editors of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* are pleased to consider for publication articles relating to the ongoing work of those involved in helping other people through religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, education, and counseling.

Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief, Robert M. Hamma (rhamma@regis.edu) as an e-mail attachment. Please allow four to six weeks time for a response.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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Editor's Page

A NEW CHAPTER

It was about a year ago that I received an e-mail from Fr. Bill Barry. He wrote to all of the members of the Advisory Board to announce his decision to step down at the end of 2008 and to ask for our suggestions for a new editor-in-chief. I printed the e-mail and put it in my bag. Out of sight, but not out of mind. "Should I put my name in or not?" The weeks passed, the question persisted.

I was never a Jesuit, nor even Jesuit educated. But I've long benefited from Ignatian spirituality. I've used Ignatius' Rules for Discernment before and so I knew it was time to put them to work again. The reasons not to proceed were easy to list: I'd only been on the advisory board for about a year and had not been that involved. I'm not a psychologist or a theologian, and am not involved in formation work. I had other writing projects to pursue. I'm too busy at home and my work at Ave Maria Press is demanding enough. I dwelt with these thoughts and listened to their voices.

But then the positive reasons to pursue it also began to surface: I have twenty-five years of experience as an editor and many of the books I have acquired and helped to develop are a very good fit with the mission of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. Plus, I have many good contacts and know how to network. And while I'm not a specialist in any one area of ministry or theology, I have an M.A. in theology and an M.Div. and am well versed in many areas. And I have experience as a pastoral minister, spiritual director, and liturgist.

As I tried to listen in freedom to what the Spirit was saying through my sense of attraction to this possibility, I came to the conclusion that there was a need here that I could help serve. Even though there were many challenges, I sensed a call to accept them. And so after reflection and prayer, and with the encouragement of family and friends, I decided to "put my name in the hat."

I was soon contacted by Paul Brocker who oversees HUMAN DEVELOPMENT at Regis University for Fr. Michael Sheeran, S.J., the president of the university. Both warmly welcomed my interest and had a number of encouraging conversations with me. So too did my long time friend and senior editor for HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Br. Loughlan Sofield. A meeting was arranged with Paul, executive editor Linda Amadeo, subscription manager Kate Sullivan and myself. It was an excellent opportunity to begin to get to know one another and to discuss the vision, the challenges, and the future plans for HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. When they generously offered me the opportunity, I accepted. I hope that I will be worthy of their trust and able to further the legacy of this wonderful publication.

At the same time I will continue with my full-time position as editorial director of Ave Maria Press. I am grateful for the support of Ave Maria's publisher Tom Grady and from my colleagues there. I believe that there will be many ways that the work of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT will cross-pollinate with the work of Ave Maria Press to their mutual benefit.

While this is the first issue that I have edited, I have been on the job for a few months prior. I want to thank Fr. Bill Barry, our outgoing editor-in-chief, for his help in getting acclimated and learning more about the vision of the magazine. I have been privileged to edit a number of Bill's books at Ave Maria Press and formerly when I was with Paulist Press. It is an even greater privilege and challenge to follow him in this role. I know he will continue to be busy, but I will rely on his council as we move forward.

With this issue we also bid farewell to Executive Editor Linda Amadeo, who has retired. Linda worked closely with Fr. Jim Gill in their ministry of formation and consultation and has served HUMAN DEVELOPMENT since its founding. We are most grateful for all she has

done for the magazine and for the church through her work. We wish her good health and happiness in her retirement.

Just as I considered the mission of the magazine when I was discerning this invitation to join HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, I think it is fitting at the outset to return to the original vision and mission of the magazine. That is why the first article of this issue is a reprint of the editorial Fr. Jim Gill wrote for the very first issue. And it is also why it is valuable to return to the mission statement that is found on our website, www.humandevelopmentmag.org.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT magazine is published for people involved in the work of fostering the growth of others. This includes persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care and education, including parents, teachers, coaches, students or others interested in the development of the whole person.

Fr. Gill expressed its purpose as helping readers "all over the world to gain enough theoretical knowledge and the basic skills to enable them to act effectively in ways that will foster full human development." It is a wonderfully broad mission. In the beginning the magazine focused on those specifically involved in the work of religious and priestly formation. We continue to seek to serve those involved in this work. But as the Church's understanding of ministry has broadened, so too has the work of formation and the scope of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. Today, permanent deacons, parish life coordinators, lay ecclesial ministers, spiritual companions and directors, ministers to the sick, and bereavement ministers are among the many who participate in formation programs designed for their ministries. We hope that the articles we present will serve their needs as well.

Our mission statement today likewise identifies "parents, teachers, coaches, students or others interested in the development of the whole person." We will be looking for new and creative ways to meet their needs as well.

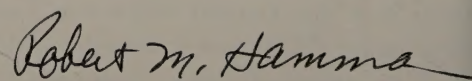
This issue continues with the article, "Strong Medicine: Health Care Practice as a Spiritual Discipline." Health care is an issue at the core of the church's pastoral care. At a time when adequate health care is unavailable to many and is often depersonalized, this reflection by Daniel P. Sulmasy, O.F.M. and M.D is most timely.

The work of spiritual formation is a vital part of the "development of the whole person." We are very pleased to present two articles in this issue by leading figures in the integration of psychology and spirituality. In "Let's Look Together," Robert J. Wicks reflects on the collaborative approach to spiritual direction that was so characteristic of Fr. Henri Nouwen. Paul Coutinho, S.J., likewise addresses the work of spiritual formation in his article "St. Ignatius of Loyola on Psychological and Spiritual Wholeness."

As we await the coming of spring, Mary Elizabeth Kenel generously shares her spiritual insight with us in her article "Greening the Spirit." Drawing on Hildegard of Bingen and Jungian archetypes, she offers a fresh understanding of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those involved in RCIA and Confirmation preparation will find this a helpful article.

Once again we are most grateful for the creativity and thoughtfulness shared by Jim Torrens, S.J., and Margaret Cessna, H.M.

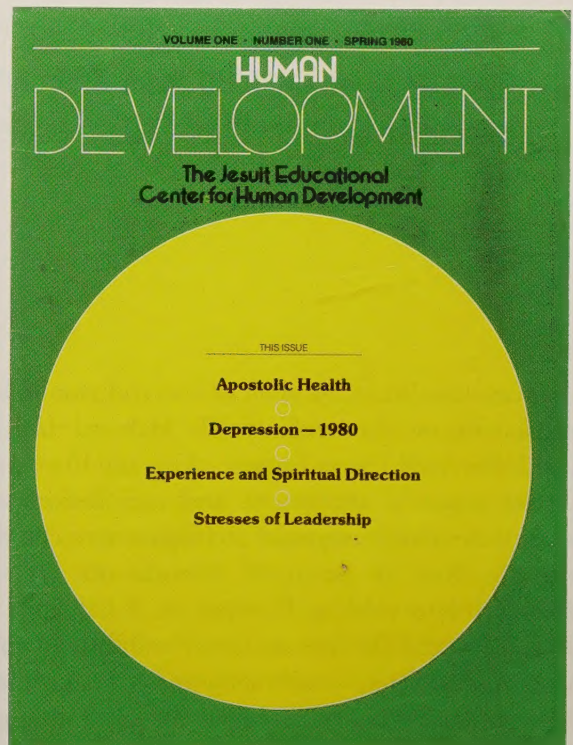
Among the hopes that Fr. Gill expressed for the magazine was that it would be able to reach to places where he and his collaborators could not go. Today, that hope has more than been fulfilled. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT has almost 4000 subscribers on every continent except Antarctica. (We'll offer a free online subscription to the first person from Antarctica who requests one!) As you might expect, we have subscribers in the United Kingdom, Brazil, South Africa, India, and Australia. But would you have guessed that we also have subscribers in Norway and Malta, in Cuba and Paraguay, in Togo and Angola, in Pakistan and Myanmar, in New Zealand and the Solomon Islands? The Word goes forth to the ends of the earth! As Jim Gill said: "One of the strongest recommendations St. Ignatius gave us to guide our decision making is that we should always think in terms of the most far-reaching or widespread good that can be pursued for the benefit of God's people." Far reaching indeed!



Robert M. Hamma

The Founding Vision of Human Development

James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.



Editor's Note: As we begin a new chapter in the story of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE, it seems fitting to return to the founding vision. The first issue was published in the Spring of 1980. In his first editorial, Fr. James Gill described the rationale and purpose of the magazine and outlined his vision for it.

It is the hope of all of us on the staff and advisory board of the magazine, and of the many at Regis University who generously work with us to publish it, to continue the vision he expressed here and to ensure that it will be a "vehicle to convey continuously the kinds of information that persons in growth-influencing roles would welcome."

As a firm believer in the ancient maxim "confession is good for the soul," I feel I owe the reader an explanation of how this new quarterly publication came about. There is more than a little self-protection involved.

For years now, I have been haunted by thoughts that I suspect Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would have called a dream. It begins with my gratitude to the Society of Jesus for having given me the chance to go through medical school, internship, and psychiatric training after ordination to the priesthood. Following those ten years came season after season of experiencing repeatedly the elation that I find accompanies each opportunity to share insights with sisters, brothers, lay persons and clergy during courses, workshops, and other programs. Then I found myself trying to imagine what would be the best "next step" to take, as St. Ignatius would say, "for the great glory of God."

We should always think in terms of the most far-reaching or widespread good that can be pursued for the benefit of God's people.

There is also an element of survival entailed. As a psychiatrist on the staff of the Harvard University Health Services, I have been working for 15 years with a great sense of enjoyment and satisfaction among some of the most congenial colleagues one could ever hope to find. I arranged (thanks to Dr. Dana Farnsworth) to work at Harvard on a half-time basis so that I could be free to travel widely and present the programs I felt would allow me to make the best contributions I could, in view of the training and experience I was blessed to get within the diverse but overlapping fields of psychiatry and religion. Having had since childhood a somewhat uneasy feeling about Jesus' not so subtle warning that "from those to whom much has been given, much will be expected," I felt in some sense "called" to travel to Australia, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Viet Nam, Thailand, India, Africa, Italy, France, Ireland, and England, and then some, where invitations to work and superiors' assignments brought me gladly. The pace has been steady—maybe more accurately unrelenting—year after year. And what has become increasingly apparent to me is the fact that there are just too many seminaries, too many provinces, too many formation houses, and too many dioceses looking for a little help from an itinerant priest-psychiatrist for one to say yes to all the invitations, no matter how attractive or urgent they might appear. Jesuits are taught, in the spirit of our founder, to try continually to discern, with the Holy Spirit's help, which apostolic ventures we should undertake and to remain wide open to every possibility.

One of the strongest recommendations St. Ignatius gave us to guide our decision making is that we should always think in terms of the most far-reaching or widespread good that can be pursued for the benefit of God's people. Consequently, I look again carefully at the worldwide array of communities and institutions I was being asked to visit, and thus came to realize that there are three groups of religious persons who most frequently seek assistance from me and my brother priest-psychiatrists and priest-psychologists. These are unsung leaders—people making personal contact and exerting considerable influence—who are serving others as religious superiors, formation personnel, and spiritual directors. Life has not become a crisis, generally, for these people themselves. The help they request is usually needed by someone in their care. Most often the problems that arise and call for attention are related to ordinary human growth and development, not to psycho-pathology. (This is not saying that there aren't occasional times when a community member reaches the "breaking point" and professional help is required.) But what I finally recognized is that the same kinds of problems are being encountered over and over again, everywhere, and most of the distress that is being experienced is preventable.

What can be done to help formation teams, spiritual directors, and superiors all over the world to gain enough theoretical knowledge and the basic skills to enable them to act effectively in ways that will (1) foster full human development, (2) identify incipient emotional illness, and (3) secure appropriate and adequate treatment when this is required? Certainly there are a number of individuals among those groups of "helpers" who are well trained and equipped to accomplish these aims. But others are, as we know, called to the task without being given the full preparation they need. Furthermore, there isn't enough time, once the work is taken in hand, to do the reading of books and periodicals that would be required in order to keep up with all the latest useful information from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counseling, and medicine.

RESPONDING TO A WORLDWIDE NEED

Gradually, with suggestions from many, I sharpened the question: How can I best help religious

people in potentially influential positions with their communities to know enough about the art of intervening helpfully in the process of normal human development throughout the full life-cycle, so that they can function as effectively as possible in facilitating the lifelong growth of those the Lord is entrusting to their care?

It seemed logical at this point in my quest to think in terms of a publication of some sort, one that could serve as a vehicle to convey continuously the kinds of information that persons in growth-influencing roles would welcome. A quarterly schedule was thought by many of our religious consultants to be most advisable, at least at the start. It should be in English but available to publishers for translation into other languages. Our advisors also strongly suggested that the price of the subscription be minimal, the enterprise nonprofit, and copies sent without charge into Third World countries and communities where paying the full price of subscription would not be feasible. It was recommended, in order to make this possible, that we also seek financial assistance from benevolent foundations.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT has thus come into existence as a project that we believe can respond to an urgent and worldwide need. It is my hope, and that of my associates in this venture, Father Angelo D'Agostino, S.J., M.D. (Senior Editor), Linda Amadeo, R.N., M.S. (Associate Editor), and our editorial board, that this publication—launched with great vigor, hopefulness, and joy—will provide the content and the forum for exchange you want. We know that in the various parts of the world and among the diversified religious communities that encompass it, many new things are being tried and learned about religious formation, dealing with change, aiding the aging or dying, helping novices and seminaries persevere, resisting “burnout,” and the like. We want to hear, too, what you are attempting, what proves helpful, and (perhaps most instructive of all) what fails

We want to hear your ideas.

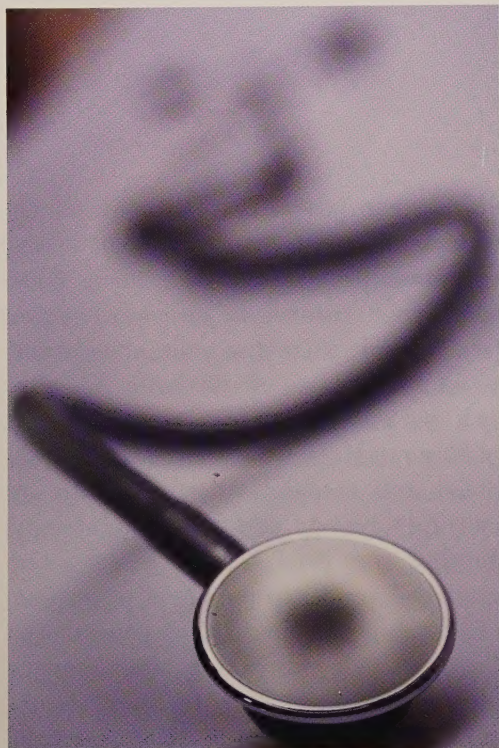
and why, so that we can pass this information along to all our readers. We want to hear your ideas, your questions, your preferences. We need your recommendations, your comments about what we print that proves helpful; what disappoints, interests, or puzzles you; in sum, about all we write. We also want very much to publish articles you may feel inclined to contribute to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. We will be happy to read and respond to manuscripts, as long as they are typed and are previously unpublished, be they very brief or quite lengthy. Let the subject matter and your own judgment determine how long they ought to be. Review a book you want to recommend, if you like, one you think other readers concerned with human development should know about. Or, if you don't feel inclined to write an article or review, please don't hesitate to send a note to us to let us know what topic or issue you would want us to cover.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT is the name we have given our publication because it seems capable of suggesting what is our most deep and heartfelt concern: the fulfillment of Christ's intention in coming among us so that all may have life, and have it “more abundantly.”

STRONG MEDICINE:

Health Care Practice as a Spiritual Discipline

Daniel P. Sulmasy, O.F.M., M.D., Ph.D.



This article is based, in part, upon materials from Dr. Sulmasy's previously published works: "Is Medicine a Spiritual Practice?" Academic Medicine 1999, Vol. 74, pp. 1002-4; A Balm for Gilead (Georgetown University Press, 2006), chapter 3; The Rebirth of the Clinic (Georgetown University Press, 2006), chapter 2.

Is health care a spiritual practice? This must seem like an odd question to most people in the Western world today. That health care is the most delicate and intricate form of applied science, most would agree. That what is not science in health care could be called art—the making of particular judgments about particular patients—most would also agree. And that there is a poetic beauty to some aspects of the practice of this art, and a need for a deeper sense of care and compassion in medicine, many would agree. But would they agree that medicine, nursing, dentistry, psychology, and the other healing professions are spiritual practices? The skeptics would say: "Not since the Middle Ages! The era of witchcraft is thankfully behind us. The era of molecular medicine is dawning."

If anything, many clinicians might believe that chaplains could possibly be of some limited use to some patients, helping them cope with illness. But this would be adjunctive. It would not be "real health care." What has spirituality to do with health care, or health care with spirituality?

The answer may first depend upon what one means by spirituality. Many people equate spirituality with religion. However, although they are conceptually related, these words are not synonymous. (See my book, *The Healer's Calling*.) Spirituality is a much broader term than religion. One's spirituality may be defined simply as the characteristics and qualities of one's relationship with the transcendent. It includes attitudes, habits, and practices in relation to the idea of the transcendent. Everyone may thus be said to have a spirituality. Many people call the transcendent, "God." But one may also live in relationship with the transcendent and refuse to personalize it or call it "God." Even if one explicitly rejects the existence of the transcendent, one still has a relationship with it at least by way of rejecting it. By this broad definition, even an atheist has a spirituality, because an atheist must search for personal meaning and value in light of his or her rejection of the possibility of a transcendent source of personal meaning and value.

By contrast, a religion is a specific set of beliefs about the transcendent, held in common by a community of persons, usually in association with a particular language used to describe spiritual experiences and a communal sharing of key beliefs, along with particular associated practices, texts, rituals, and teachings. In a religion, people share in common some basic, overarching assumptions about the transcendent. Not everyone has a religion.

It has become increasingly common in the United States for people to describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious." (See Don Lattin's article and the study by Kosmin, et. al.). By the definitions I have offered, this is not oxymoronic or otherwise logically impossible. Whether being "spiritual but not religious" is personally, socially, and theologically sustainable is another matter. But it cannot be dismissed out of hand. And it is a position that is becoming more prevalent.

But religions have a great deal to say about spirituality. And I am fully persuaded that if a Christian speaks out of the fullness of Christian conviction, and a Buddhist speaks out of the fullness of Buddhist conviction, and an atheist speaks out of the fullness of atheist conviction, then deep spiritual resonances will occur and each can learn enormously from the other.

While in one sense spirituality is broader than religion, in another sense, spirituality is ultimately more specific than religion. Within every religion there will be groups of people who share the key beliefs of the religion and remain part of the community of believers, yet have slightly different ways of praying, and other slightly different ways of living out their relationships with the transcendent. So, within the one Catholic Church there are charismatics and traditionalists, Dominicans and Franciscans, Jesuits and Benedictines. There are people who pray the rosary and people who practice centering prayer. All are distinct spiritualities within one religion. And at the end of the day, since every human personality is unique, every human relationship with the transcendent is also unique. Spirituality is therefore ultimately personal. Only persons can apprehend, question, and live lives that engage the transcendent.

SPIRITUALITY AND HEALTH CARE PRACTICE

What, then, do spirituality and religion have to do with health care practice? One reply comes from Abraham Heschel, the twentieth century Jewish philosopher and theologian. Heschel once said in an address to the American Medical Association, "To heal a person, one must first be a person." This is the first step in building a spirituality for health care.

If health care professionals are committed to healing patients as whole persons, then they must understand not only what disease and injury do to patients' bodies, but also what disease and injury do to them as embodied spiritual persons grappling with transcendent questions.

Yet in the midst of all that is being written and said these days about spirituality and health care, it is surprising that so little has been said about the spiritual lives of physicians and nurses. As Heschel reminds us, if health care professionals are to heal patients as whole persons, they themselves must seriously engage the transcendent questions that only persons can ask. If health care professionals are to be true healers, they must rediscover what it means for health care to be a spiritual practice.

The relationship between health care and spirituality has become problematic in the twenty-first century in a way that it never was in earlier eras, and is not now for many non-Western cultures. A simple story

He offered to summarize his sermon. He paused for a moment and then said simply, "This Jesus. Strong medicine."

illustrates this. A Roman Catholic couple went to Easter Mass on a Canadian reservation where a native North American bishop was presiding in his tribal language. The couple, both physicians, were the only white people in the church. The bishop's sermon was lengthy. As he preached, every once in a while he turned to them, acknowledging his awareness that they understood nothing of what he was saying. At the end of a thirty-minute sermon, he turned to the guests, and welcomed them in broken English on behalf of his congregation. He offered to summarize his sermon. He paused for a moment and then said simply, "This Jesus. Strong medicine."

Efficacious, scientific Western medicine is also strong, but is it strong enough? Western health care works, and very few people want to give up antibiotics or neurosurgery in favor of crystals. But is it not possible to practice excellent scientific medicine, nursing, dentistry, psychology, and other health professions and still be aware of the spiritual dimension of the work and responsive to the spiritual needs of patients? Illness is a spiritual event. Illness grasps persons by the soul and by the body and disturbs them both. Illness ineluctably raises troubling questions of a transcendent nature—questions about meaning, value, and relationship. These are spiritual questions. How health care professionals answer these questions for themselves will affect the way they help their patients struggle with these questions.

We who provide health care know so little about the ways in which we touch the lives of our patients, or about the ways in which we fail them. Some time ago, for example, I found myself in a discussion with a

nurse about the role of touch in relation to health care and spirituality. She had misinterpreted something I had said during a lecture, and to demonstrate, somewhat defensively, that I really did believe in touching patients, I asked if she would mind if I showed her how I generally use my stethoscope to listen to a patient's lungs by first placing my right hand on the patient's shoulder. I demonstrated, "Like so," using my left hand to substitute for the stethoscope.

She then responded, "Oh. Do you know what that does to patients? What it communicates?" Even more defensive and stunned, I said, "No." She then asked permission to demonstrate on me. She said, "You could touch people like this," and leaned a bit on my shoulder to balance herself in a perfunctory manner. "But that's not what you do. Here's what you do." And then I understood that she and I had really been in agreement all along, only I had been unaware of the healing power that went out from me (cf. Luke 8:46). She touched my shoulder in such an amazing way that it seemed at the same time as if she were not touching me; in a manner that communicated confidence and compassion at once; in a way that signified respect and connection at once. It felt as if a static charge hovered between her hand and my shoulder. And yet she was really touching me, and there was no space between us.

"Is that really what I do?" I asked. "I guess so," she said. "That's what you did when you demonstrated for me." "Wow," I thought. "Strong medicine."

From my perspective, the transcendent, healing presence of the divine can be found right in the midst of the interstices of daily practice—in the infinite space that subsists between our hands and the bodies of the patients we touch. Too few of us bother to reflect on it, or to talk to each other about it. The transcendent, healing presence of the divine is not only to be found in explicitly religious conversation with patients who are dying, but in all those countless moments in the office or the hospital in which we communicate meaning and value to our patients, and relate to them as persons. A powerful cancer treatment drug like adriamycin doesn't necessarily get in the way of this, but it can. If we use the drug incompetently, we violate the trust the patient has placed in us—a trust that transcends the relationship between patient and professional and transcends adriamycin. To betray that trust is to deny the spirit.

Adriamycin can also get in the way of the spirit if we somehow come to believe the falsehood that the patient's story (or our own story) begins and ends in Adriamycin. There are no transcendent pharmaceutical agents. But there are always transcendent questions—about meaning, value, and relationship. Spirituality in practice begins when the doctor or nurse becomes aware that these questions arise in and through illness and injury, and that they can be addressed in and through health care practice. Paul Ramsey reminded us that patients are first and foremost persons. It is time we began to recognize that physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals are also first and foremost persons.

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

For the Christian, serious reflection about health care and spirituality begins and ends with Jesus Christ—the Alpha and the Omega. Christ speaks to Christians in many ways, through the revelation of scripture, the collective reflections of the believing Church, the sacraments, and the experience of life itself. All of these are important listening posts—sources by which one can hear what Christ says about health care.

I will put my ear to one of those listening posts—using the gospel as a sensor through which to pick up the spiritual signals that permeate clinical experience. The story I will take as my starting point begins with the experience of the disciples after the death of Jesus. Demoralized by the cruel execution of the man they had thought was the Messiah, their dreams were shattered. They harbored fears about whether they would be rounded up next. Luke, the physician, tells the story of how two of them eventually came to recognize him as their companion on the journey when they broke bread together (Luke 24:13-35). This passage from Luke may be very familiar to some readers, and completely new to others. But even if it is familiar, a rarely asked question about this story is what prevented the disciples from recognizing Jesus? Doesn't it seem strange? He was their friend, and they didn't recognize him. What could have prevented them from recognizing him?

Perhaps they were just too demoralized by their grief and the shattering of their dreams. Perhaps they were just a little bit too self-absorbed. Perhaps

Patients are first and foremost persons.

they were too busy complaining that the glory days were gone. Perhaps they just had too little faith to believe that it was possible for him to appear to them. Perhaps they were too busy telling their story to listen to his.

They only recognized him later, when they took time to reflect on what was happening in their lives. And when they did, they said, "Were our hearts not burning within us when he spoke to us on the way?" It just may be the case that health care professionals, like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, have been prevented from seeing.

I am convinced that spirituality "happens" in the daily practices of all clinicians—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. To demonstrate, I will share one of my yesterdays, a yesterday that is really everyday. Yesterday morning on rounds, I saw a 70-year-old vet with altered mental status and a recurrent cancer of one of the salivary glands. He lives alone. His appearance was disheveled. He was confused and tearful. A four-inch incision was weeping pus, and it smelled. He had a new one-inch mass in front of his ear.

I saw a 47-year-old alcoholic grandmother with AIDS who looked at least 67. She had pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, a yeast infection in her mouth, and oral and genital herpes. But there was a remarkable, quiet kindness and gratitude in her eyes. I can still see it.

I also saw a 31-year-old man with AIDS and a fulminant case of a cancer of the blood vessels called Kaposi's sarcoma all through his lungs. He was on a respirator. He had only been intermittently compliant with his treatment for HIV. His sister was the only member of the family who knew he had AIDS. He was absolutely terrified. The chemotherapy began within

The spirituality of medical practice must therefore begin with a frank acknowledgment of how much health care professionals are suffering today.

an hour after they had pulled the lighted tube through which they made the diagnosis out of his windpipe. I left the room doubting we would be able to save him, no matter how heroic our efforts.

I also saw a man who had spent the last 11 months in an unresponsive state, identified simply as "Unknown Hispanic Male." He was hit by a car on the FDR Drive in Manhattan, but, remarkably, he had started waking up. He still had a tracheostomy and was paralyzed and could not talk. But he was waking up. Painstakingly, we learned that his name is José, that he had been living in Queens before the accident, that he had no family in New York, and that his mother lives somewhere in Puerto Rico, but not in the city of San Juan. He smiled yesterday for the first time in 11 months. He's awake. He's alive. His name is José.

I saw him yesterday morning. You saw him yesterday on your morning rounds as well. And were your hearts not burning within you? Did you not learn from him how much the Messiah had to suffer before entering into his glory? Did he not open up the scriptures for you? It happened just yesterday. Or were your eyes prevented from recognizing him?

BARRIERS TO SPIRITUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

Multiple barriers presently stand in the way of this "repersonalization" of health care, this reawakening of health care as a spiritual enterprise. The present economic reconstruction of health care is surely one of these barriers. Reconceptualized to be like any other industry, the chief virtue in health care is no longer compassion, empathy, or fidelity to trust. The chief virtue of industry is efficiency. Working in a system in which all parts are considered interchangeable,

and any patient can see any physician or nurse about any problem in any place at any time, it becomes more difficult to believe that questions about relationships have transcendent meaning.

Working in a system in which financial incentives have been reconfigured to make physician and patient economic rivals, it is hard for either patients or physicians to feel that their value constitutes true dignity—that value which has no price and belongs only to persons (see Emmanuel Kant). This value is the value of those created in the image and the likeness of God.

Working in a system in which patient visits have been reduced to seven minutes, it becomes almost unimaginable that questions of meaning can be addressed. Yet these neglected questions of meaning constitute the spiritual in health care.

The spirituality of medical practice must therefore begin with a frank acknowledgment of how much health care professionals are suffering today. Many doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals now long to be able to give the spiritual questions of practice their due. But too many find their efforts thwarted by demands to shorten the time spent with patients, fill out more forms, refer patients to specialists they have never met, and to treat them with formulary-approved drugs they have never used before. This spiritual suffering has two sources. First, scientific reductionism has threatened the spiritual aspects of medical practice from within, by denying the existence of the transcendent. Second, the industrialization of health care now threatens the spiritual aspects of medical practice from without, denying the importance of the spiritual.

Yet no amount of economic transformation can alter the fundamental meaning and value of health care, nor can it ever eradicate the interpersonal nature of the healing relationship that begins when one person feels ill, and another, highly skilled and socially authorized asks, "How can I help you?" The spirituality of medical practice at the dawn of the twenty-first century in America therefore demands great virtue—courage, hope, perseverance, and as Gabriel Marcel pointed out, creative fidelity. It is certainly not easy to be a health care professional today. But when all is said and done, we know that we still touch patients in remarkable ways. The spiritual meaning of health care will outlast all mergers, all

managed care organizations, all Medicare and Medicaid cutbacks, all bogus accusations of fraud and abuse, all malpractice suits, all direct to consumer advertising for drugs, and all manner of profiteering at the expense of patients. If spirituality is real, it is real for times of trial as well as times of triumph. Money can't buy spirituality. And money can't make it go away.

HEALING

If the work of health care professionals is healing, it may be important to try to come to grips with what it means to heal. And in particular, one might ask whether there is anything one might call a Catholic approach to healing. It seems indisputable that healing has played a major role in the lived experience of Christian faith from the beginning. Yet Roman Catholic Christianity has placed an emphasis on healing that is perhaps distinctive among the Christian Churches.

Healing is woven into the fabric of the Catholic Church's spiritual, sacramental, and ministerial life. All Christians pray for the sick. Certainly, other Christian churches have healing services. Miraculous physical healings seem central, for instance, to American Protestant revivalist prayer meetings. But only the Catholics and the Orthodox have a sacrament of the sick. Other Christian churches have embraced health care as a ministry, and some have even sponsored hospitals, but none to the extent that Catholics have done so. For example, the first modern physicians were medieval monk-herbalists. And even today, 20% of the hospital admissions in the U.S. are to facilities operated under Catholic auspices, according to the Catholic Health Association.

So, what does healing mean in Catholic consciousness that makes it so important?

Ironically, despite all the distinctively Catholic emphasis on practice and healing, I think the Catholic understanding of the meaning of healing is more generically Christian than specifically Catholic. Since I think the Catholic answer to the question will be based largely on what Jesus said and did as recorded in the scriptures, it is an answer that any Protestant Christian could easily give. Obviously, there are also aspects of the Catholic answer that will resonate vibrantly with other systems of religious belief. In the end, what makes Catholic healing Catholic is not a different belief about what healing means, but rather the way

this church has given shape to the meaning of healing in a typically Catholic, incarnational fashion. That is to say, Catholics have shaped the meaning of Christian healing in the very concrete, in-the-flesh ways that characterize the Catholic Christian tradition—such as sacraments and hospitals.

For example, not only is anointing of the sick a sacrament, but before every communion we Catholics echo the words of the centurion who sought healing for his servant: "Only say the word and I shall be healed." We Catholics also have a tendency to create institutions, enshrining our ministries in bricks and mortar. And so it is no accident that there are so many Catholic hospitals.

But the Catholic expression of the meaning of Christian healing is not the meaning itself. In the rest of this article, I will offer a more fundamental reflection on the meaning of healing. I would like to suggest that Christian healing can be understood in three important ways—as the restoration of right relationships, as encounter, and as witness.

HEALING AS THE RESTORATION OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

Healing has often been understood etymologically as a "making whole." But what does this "making whole" really mean? All too commonly, the understanding of "making whole" is quite facile, leading to very loose talk about "holistic" health care. Certainly, one cannot be opposed to "holistic" care if this means attentiveness to the ill person's psychosocial and spiritual needs. However, "holistic" sometimes includes the most banal fringes of New Age spirituality, suggesting, almost, that immortality can be achieved through dietary manipulation. I believe healing is a making whole, but in a very particular way.

The understanding of healing that I would like to offer, however, first requires taking a step back from health care. I want to suggest that to understand the meaning of healing in the new way that I am proposing requires one to understand the constitution of the universe itself in a way that might at first seem unfamiliar and strange.

A complete explication of what I am proposing would require a much longer discourse in physics and metaphysics than is possible in a limited number of words. But briefly, the understanding I would like to share, emerging largely from contemporary physics, is this: The most basic stuff of the universe, the stuff



we call matter, can no longer be understood as merely what remains after chopping up physical bodies into smaller and smaller parts. "Chopping" is what physics, biology, and medicine did so successfully until the twentieth century—breaking up bodies into parts, parts into molecules, molecules into atoms, and atoms into subatomic particles. But once one arrives at the particle level, a fundamental rule emerges that is really true about everything, no matter how big or small, namely, that field is prior to matter. That is to say that what matter, or anything else, is, at its most fundamental level, is not a pile of unimaginably tiny bodies, but a set of temporary yet dynamic relationships in the electromagnetic field that is already given.

Subatomic particles, the so-called building blocks of matter itself, can only be understood as entities defined by complex relationships. As physicist Niels Bohr once put it, "...in our description of nature the purpose is ... only to track down, so far as it is possible, relations between the manifold aspects of our experience." The naïve atomism of Democritus, smashed by Aristotle, revived again by Galileo, refined by Dalton, and made normative by Mill, has been smashed again by Einstein, Planck, Bohr, and Heisenberg. Matter is not isolated bits of individual particularity. Matter itself is relational.

From a philosophical point of view, as Bernard Lonergan has argued, when one knows some "thing" (literally, any "thing"), what one is really grasping is a complex set of relationships, whether that thing is a quark, a virus, a patient, or a galaxy. Put most

succinctly, being is relationship. For the Christian, this truth is preeminently understood as the very nature of the Triune God. God is a relationship: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Less obviously, sickness, rightly understood, is a disruption of right relationships. It is not "looking at a bad body inside an otherwise healthy body." As Frank Davidoff has asked, "Who has seen a blood sugar?" Diabetes is not a "bad body" that one sees through the lens of some device, but a disturbance in that set of right relationships that constitutes the homeostasis of the thing we call a human being.

Ancient peoples readily understood sickness as a disturbance in relationships. Since these peoples had a keen sense of the relationship between human beings and the cosmos, the task of the Shaman was to heal by restoring the relationship between the sick person and the cosmos. Thus, healing was a religious act. It consisted in the restoration of right relationships between people and their gods.

Contemporary scientific healing also consists in the restoration of right relationships. However, scientific healing heretofore has understood this as limited to the restoration of those relationships that constitute the homeostasis of the patient as an individual organism. From a purely scientific point of view, healing means restoring the balance of blood sugar in relation to other biochemical processes; restoring the due regard cancer cells ought to have in relation to other cells; restoring the proper temporal relationship between the pacemaker cells of the heart and other physiological processes; restoring blood pressure to the level that allows the heart and lungs to maintain their proper relationships with the other vital organs.

But illness, as I have suggested, disturbs more than relationships inside the human organism. It disrupts families and workplaces. It shatters pre-existing patterns of coping. It raises questions about one's relationship with God.

Jesus also understood healing as the restoration of right relationships in this fuller sense. I think that is why his healing miracles occur so often in association with reconciliation. Before he heals the paralytic, he says, "Your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 15:17-26).

When his own disciples ask Jesus about the man born blind, "Whose sin caused his condition?" Jesus

restores right relationships within the community as well as within the physiology of the man by declaring, as he heals him, that neither his sins nor his parents' sins caused the illness (John 9:1-40).

What medicine seems to be missing today, and Christianity can help bring back to it, is this broad understanding of healing as the restoration of right relationships—not only relationships inside the body, but also those between the sick and their families, their communities, and God.

HEALING AS ENCOUNTER

For the Christian, healing is also a direct encounter with God. I know of no other religious figure before Jesus who makes a claim as remarkable as the claim of Matthew 25, "I was sick and you came to visit me." In Christianity, visiting the sick and caring for their needs is not merely a moral duty, but an actual encounter with Christ. He says, "You came to visit me." The one who reaches out to the sick person finds God, and not just in the act of helping the person, but in the person himself or herself, for the sick person, according to the Scriptures, is already Christ, waiting. The patient is thus an *alter Christus*. If one really understands what this means, it is a theologically stunning claim.

So, to be a healer is to find God in those in need of healing. For the Christian, healing is a direct encounter with the divine. And that encounter, if genuine, necessarily causes personal transformation. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite ignore God when they ignore the wounded man, and so their lives remain unchanged—they keep walking down the same path (Luke 10:29-37). The man the Good Samaritan finds bleeding on the side of the road is really the Lord. And in picking him up and binding his wounds, the Samaritan's life is changed. Likewise, St. Bonaventure suggests that in embracing the leper, St. Francis of Assisi embraced Christ himself, who as Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 53:3), was like a leper, outcast and despised. After this encounter, the life of Francis was never the same again.

So, while religious health care professionals may often want to understand themselves as "channels" for God's healing power, Christianity teaches that they would perhaps be better served if they understood themselves first and foremost as persons privileged to serve God by serving the sick.

The one who reaches out to the sick person
finds God.

HEALING AS WITNESS

Jesus commissioned his disciples to "cure the sick," and this was clearly part of their charge to spread the "good news" of the Gospel (Matthew 10:1,7; Mark 16:18; Luke 9:1-6). So, while healing may be an encounter with God, there also appears to be a sense in which Christ intended that healing should be a way of evangelizing, of announcing that the reign of God is at hand. And the disciples clearly did this. The Acts of the Apostles records the many healings they performed in the name of Christ (Acts 3:1-10; 5:12-16; 9:36-43; 20:7-12). But one might wonder why healing should be such a special sign of the presence of God. Christ could have performed other sorts of miracles, and could have asked the disciples likewise to announce his presence by performing miracles that had nothing to do with healing. If the purpose of the miracles were only to show God's power, then why not turn the Temple into gold, or make people fly, or turn stones into bread (Luke 4:3-4), or frogs into princes? True, there is the story of Jesus turning water into wine, but that was because his mother asked (John 2:1-11)! What else could a good Jewish boy like Jesus do under such circumstances? The vast majority of Jesus' miracles were miracles of healing, despite the fact that other actions would clearly have been just as convincing as displays of God's power.

It is perhaps also significant that miracles of healing are the predominant miracles of the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant. While there are a few stories of miraculous healing in the Hebrew

Scriptures, such as Elisha healing Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5), Isaiah healing Hezekiah's boil (Isaiah 38:21), and Tobias curing his father Tobit's blindness with the help of the angel Raphael (Tobit 11:1-16), most of the miracles of the Old Covenant were of a different sort—burning bushes, parting seas, and pillars of fire. These are miracles of power and awe, not of healing.

Perhaps the vast majority of the miracles of the New Testament are miracles of healing because healing has particular features that make it especially suitable as the miracle of choice for Jesus and his disciples. One of the reasons that Jesus healed is that healing is evangelical. It is symbolic of the good news made manifest in Jesus. God's dream for the universe has always been, ever since the sin of Adam, the dream of universal reconciliation—the complete restoration of right relationship everywhere. Healing the body is thus, *par excellence*, a sign of God's reconciling love. Healing an individual's body announces the healing of the Mystical Body of Christ. The broken human family needs the homeostasis that God promises in Christ Jesus. Healing the body of any individual human being ought to remind that person of his or her radical dependence upon God. Healing is never peripheral to who we are as embodied creatures. Such acts as the creation of gold, heroic or unusual feats, and the acquisition of power or prestige are really peripheral to our humanity.

Healing is about who we are as persons integrally considered, as finite embodied creatures made in God's own image and likeness. And so, healing is truly an evangelical act. It announces all this good news. Christians heal because they are commanded by Christ to do so. Healing is a special sign of God's promise of universal right relationship. And Christians do not heal by any power they possess, but by virtue of their need to share with others the good news they have heard, announced by and in Jesus.

Quite obviously, those who are non-believers can also heal. Much of medicine today, with its success (and also with its emptiness), is the healing of unbelief. Those who heal thinking that they have done so by their own power commit the sin of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-25). They do not understand that all healing

comes from God (Sirach 38:1-15), and harbor the false belief that healing is something they can buy, or possess, or control.

Likewise, many people are healed and fail to recognize what has happened to them in a deeper way. This is clearly true of most patients in the Western world. This precise situation is described in the gospel story of Jesus' healing of ten lepers, only one of whom returns to thank him. Perhaps nine out of ten lepers today, once healed, forget to return to Jesus to thank him for having cured them. And so Jesus inquires after all those patients who leave our hospitals today, having considered cure their entitlement, "Why has only one returned to thank me? Where are the other nine?" (Luke 17:11-19). Gratitude is the right relationship between any healed human being and God. Grateful hearts proclaim good news.

CONCLUSION

So, quite briefly, I have sketched out three ways of understanding the meaning of healing from a Catholic Christian perspective—as the restoration of right relationships, as encounter with Christ, and as witness to Christ. All three happen simultaneously and inseparably every time a physician, nurse, psychologist, or other health care professional reaches out, in faith, to any one of God's children who is sick. Among our major tasks in health care today is to rediscover a form of practice that can heal the health care system in just the same way. Our health care system is sick, out of balance, and fraught with distorted and bizarre relationships.

Yet even in a depersonalized system of care such as our own, those who can see their service to the sick as ministry may finally become humble enough to recognize that they are not God, and respectful enough of their patients to recognize in them the face of the divine. This is our common call. Every health care professional is capable of responding to that call, yet we know that not everyone does.

To heal a person, one must first be a person. We are all spiritual beings, and health care truly is a spiritual discipline.

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DAILY ROUTINES AND BIPOLAR DISORDER

Many people are afflicted with bipolar disorder, in which a person oscillates between bouts of almost uncontrolled high spirits and energy and bouts of deep depression. The disorder is amenable to treatment, often by lithium. But recent research also indicates that regular daily routines, especially regular times of sleeping and waking, ease the symptoms. One hypothesis is that those who have this disorder are more sensitive to disruptions in daily routines of times for sleep, eating, and exercise. Some of the research supporting this conclusion is reported in *Monitor on Psychology*, February 2008, p. 10.

“Let’s Look Together”

The Collaborative Spiritual Direction of Henri Nouwen



Robert J. Wicks, Ph.D.

“Do not believe that he who seeks to comfort you lives untroubled among the simple and quiet words that sometimes do you good. His life has much difficulty and remains far behind yours. Were it otherwise he would never have been able to find those words.”

Ranier Maria Rilke
Letters to a Young Poet

To many people—including some of his friends—Henri Nouwen often seemed to be a complex, even contradictory person. Yet, underneath this conflicting surface energy was a simple, beautiful man who loved his priesthood, truly cared for others, and wanted to do the right thing with his life.

His allure for me and so many others who met him personally, on the lecture circuit and through his books, was his uncanny ability to take his own specific experiences, feelings and reflections and write or speak about them in a way that touched a deep common chord. Most people who read Henri find at least one book that they feel was written *just for them*.

My feeling about Henri’s writings parallel that of singer Dave Alvin’s about the folk-composer Kate Wolfe. Although Alvin had never met her he was deeply moved by her song “These Times We’re Living In.” He wrote in the liner notes for the album, “I don’t know much about Kate Wolfe’s life and loves, but in a few raw and tender lines, she sure knew a lot about mine.”

Henri was able to share feelings that we all experience but seem to elude expression for us. We can't seem to find the right words to capture them. Henri was able to name and describe what we are feeling often enough for us to take his writing, stand on it and make sense of what we are about, so we can go spiritually and psychologically where we have no journey in our own lives. That's what I often experience when I read Henri's writings, especially the early works.

Furthermore, that we often don't know where to go next seems more acceptable after reading about Nouwen's own personal confusion and discernments. At a certain level, our struggles don't seem much different than his. When he gets lost, complains, or is petty, we nod and think: "Been there. Done that." (Or, more accurately, "Am still there, doing that!") Then, as we move through one of his books, as he gains greater clarity, we seem to do so as well. It's a wonderful supportive feeling when his journey toward discernment becomes ours. His spiritual friendship with us through his writing frees us.

SIMPLE KINDNESS

Central to his struggle to discern and to be himself before God was the desire to care for others. If experiences of vulnerability were the lyrics of Henri's spirituality, the music of his life certainly was his kindness. We see it in story after story about him, as this classic story recounted by Fr. Joseph Gallagher shows.

Henri Nouwen's writing and life were filled with a spirit of simple compassion. Knowing this, a young seminarian about to be ordained sent one of Henri's little books to an artist friend. He too would soon be ordained.

The young man who received the present was delighted. He took it with him on his pre-ordination retreat in Connecticut. Upon reading it he was struck by one particular line and it gave him an idea.

He decided to go out into the woods and search for just the right stone upon which to paint this beautiful message. This would then serve as a fitting surprise gift

for the friend who gave him Henri's book.

As he slowly searched around on the grounds for "just the perfect stone" (as a typical artist would), another retreatant passing by, stopped, and asked him if he had lost something. In response, the seminarian explained his delightful plan to the stranger. Whereupon, the man's face lit up and he said, "Well, I'm Henri Nouwen. *Let's look together*" *National Catholic Reporter*, November 15, 1996, p. 11).

Henri's openness to the intimacy and personal vulnerability that grounded his caring nature were evident as soon as you met him. They also came through in his writings. His books were clear, compelling, and (thank heavens!) short enough for the busiest of us to read and reflect upon during our hectic lives.

The ability to be *with* people was as purposeful in his writings as it was when he met you. He wanted to reach out and find a place in his readers' lives. He yearned to have an impact and be truly present to the vast majority of searching souls who were looking for something that was missing at the center of their lives. He wanted to have others join him in his personal search for a life that was nourishing, challenging, solid, and *real*. He truly wanted to be Henri Nouwen, spiritual friend.

For instance, when *The Genesee Diary* was first released in a mass market paperback edition he was thrilled that people rushing through an airport might pick up his book for reading on the plane. When *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* didn't satisfy the yearnings of his friend Fred Bratman and persons like him who weren't religious, he was sadly disappointed. He always wanted to be able to reach new groups of people who weren't within the fold. He wanted to make the spiritual life relevant for all without watering it down into something vague, easy, and magical, which I think unfortunately is in vogue today.

What was hard for him to realize in the case of *Life of the Beloved* (and in his book *Making All Things New* which he also hoped would reach a wider audience), was that he was so centered on a relationship with Jesus, that no matter how he tried to cast his work, this came through even though at times he wasn't fully aware of it.

I sensed both a deep holiness and
restlessness in him side by side.

Yet, despite the Christ-centered faith which infused his work, his audiences were still much wider than those of many of his contemporary authors in spirituality. Although he didn't reach secular people easily, he was enormously successful across different religious denominations. One of the reasons for this was his willingness to be "unfinished" and struggling before and with those who listened to or read his words. He didn't present as someone who was already there. He didn't write from a place of achievement or accomplishment. He knew better and said so—especially when he spoke about the spiritual life, as in this passage from *The Genesee Diary*:

"The battle is real, dangerous, and very crucial. You risk all you have; it is like fighting a bull in a bull ring. You will only know what victory is when you have been part of the battle. People who have tasted real victory are always very modest about it because they have seen the other side and know that there is little to brag about. The powers of darkness and the powers of light are too close to each other to offer the occasion for vainglory."

VULNERABILITY

When Henri spoke in his writings and letters, his struggles were the most obvious things which struck people—though once again, this may not have been his complete intention at the time. While being vulnerable with others was something he wanted and accomplished, he wasn't always aware of how much his anguish was actually out in front of people.

A former student of mine spent a week at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat center, with Henri Nouwen as a guide. Knowing my respect and warmth for Henri, she shared with me that it was a wonderfully touching experience for her to be with him for a week's retreat. She also said that Henri's sadness seemed to come through so clearly in his conferences that she felt she must let him know how much she appreciated his genuineness and sense of vulnerability.

When she did tell him what she thought, his surprising response was: "Why is it that people are able to see so clearly my sadness, but fail to grasp my joy?" This was a question he was to ask and have to deal with again and again. I think the reality was: he communicated better through his vulnerability and brokenness than through his experiences of love and peace. When you were with Henri you could feel his passion, but—if you were like me—you wished that somehow he would be a little more gentle on himself as well. My hope was that the peace he knew and could find would melt more of his anxiety and impetuous nature so his heart could relax more. When we met for the last time, his fingernails were bitten down and he seemed to be running in ten different directions. I sensed both a deep holiness and restlessness in him side by side.

In my own letters to him, I would try to be honest and confess my own dangerous impulses to seek comfort instead of a peace that I feared might cost me and others dearly. However, in the same breath I would also try to have Henri raise an opposite group of questions for himself since he seemed in such a different place than I; namely: "Does life with God have to be this hard? Is so much anguish necessary? Must it be this complicated? Do we have to be confronted with our own death to be at peace and let go of all the demands imposed by ourselves and others?"

His generous, humble response was to write simply: "Your challenge to live more at peace without having to be confronted with your own mortality is a really important one, and I hear that challenge and want to be very attentive to the questions you raise."

In his own setting at L'Arche (a community of mentally and physically challenged individuals and their companions) where he was chaplain for the last years of his life, he was asked to face his restlessness as well. In 1989, he was hit by a van while walking along the side of the road. At the edge of death, he wrote of experiencing much peace. In the book where he

related this (*Beyond the Mirror*) he was also to share how fleeting this feeling was when he got physically well again. In the "Epilogue" he notes:

It has been a few months since I wrote down my experience in the portal of death. Looking back at it now that I am again fully immersed in the complexities of daily living, I have to ask myself, "Can I hold on to what I learned?"

Recently, someone said to me, "When you were ill you were centered, and the many people who visited you felt a real peace coming from you; but since you are healed and have taken on your many tasks again, much of your old restlessness and anxiety has reappeared." I have to listen to these words.

FACING REJECTION

Henri, also like most of us, didn't suffer rejection or lack of attention well. This was another reason his writings come to life for sensitive persons like myself and others who fail to hold onto our sense of identity before a living, loving God when people criticize us. He had an uncanny awareness of how quickly his and our moods could change due to someone's reaction. This self-knowledge was reflected in his writings as well as his letters to his broad range of correspondents. In *The Genesee Diary* and the writings and lectures he presented (some of which are still available on tape) he was to return to this theme again and again. The following excerpt from his weekly meeting with Abbot John Eudes Bamberger (his spiritual director for many years) during his 1974 six-month stay at the Abbey of the Genesee offers a flavor of this awareness:

At noon I had another session with John Eudes. I took up the subject of my anger again and explained how often my anger seemed related to experiences of rejection.... In all those cases I didn't just feel a little irritated but felt deeply hurt, so much so that in moments of prayer my thoughts became involved in angry ruminations

and revengeful scenes. Even my concentration during my reading got more difficult since practically all my energy went into the experiences of the felt rejection.

John Eudes pointed out my difficulties with "nuanced responses." The problem, he said, is not that your feelings are totally illegitimate.... But the problem is that your response has no proportion to the nature of the event.... But little rejections like these open up a huge chasm, and you plunge right into it all the way to the bottom. You feel totally rejected, unloved, left alone, and something like a "blind rage" starts developing that takes over and pulls you away from concerns and interests that are much more important to you. The problem is not that you respond with irritation but that you respond in a very primitive way: without nuances.

We tried to explore the reason for this fact. Somewhere there must be a need for a total affection, an unconditional love, an ultimate satisfaction.... John Eudes made it very clear how vulnerable I am with such a need because practically nobody can offer me what I am looking for.

This deep concern with rejection would ultimately reach crisis proportions ten years later when an emotionally intimate relationship would dissolve. He was to write about his reactions to it in one of his final books *The Inner Voice of Love*.

I think one of the reasons so many of us feel an affinity with Henri and his writings is because of his ability so clearly and convincingly to communicate his own stumblings. But, more than that, his own reflections and the helpful reactions of others which he reported taught us about hope, grace...possibility. We are able to see the spiritual life as something *in process*, not a once and for all achievement. He helped us recognize and embrace Reform theologian Rudolph Bultmann's tenet that grace can never be possessed once and for all but *must* be received afresh again and again.

When you read his words you know he is
with you on the journey.

In reading his work there are themes that help orient us, give us peace, and provide the direction toward joy. In other words, like Henri we repeatedly fail, act immaturely, are disappointed in the love around us, and experience a loss of direction from which in the short run we cannot seem to escape. However, like Henri, when we read him we are encouraged by the recognition that we are “part of the battle” and feel we truly are living and flowing with God even in our failures, rather than just existing and drifting in a secular world. Henri was aware of the dual nature of the “inner desert” that he felt all people should, *must*, traverse if they were to experience life fully now.

The desert—the Egyptian desert of the Abbas and Ammas, but also our own spiritual desert—has a double quality: it is wilderness and paradise. It is wilderness, because in the desert we struggle against the “wild beasts” that attack us, the demons of boredom, sadness, anger, and pride. However, it is also paradise, because there we meet God and taste already his peace and joy (Foreword to *Desert Wisdom*).

Henri’s attractiveness as a writer is not only because he provides clear direction but also because when you read his words you know he is with you on the journey. After I sent him a copy of one of my books, in the return mail he sent me one of his own recently released works. And, in referring to the title of my book (*Living Simply in an Anxious World*) he wrote at the end of the inscription two simple words: “I’m trying.”

After hearing Henri speak, a friend of mine had a chance to encounter him when he was moving quickly and anxiously around the hall in preparation for another talk. Later that day she observed: “Henri is truly a very holy man.” Then after a pause, she added: “But he is also a nervous wreck.”

The next day I met Henri for breakfast and this bore itself out in a way I found very funny. We had just sat down and opened our menus when Henri abruptly stood up. Surprised I just looked up and he said, “This is no good. It is too noisy. They’re talking too loudly. Let’s move.” and bounded off to another table. I took a peek at the two persons in an animated discussion at the table next to us. They didn’t seem to notice either the outburst or our shift to another table.

Henri was like many of us in that he often seemed impatient or on the run. People remember this about him even during times or settings when it seemed out of place. In the silent period of gathering sponsored by the Society of Friends (Quakers), the host who was sitting next to him looked over and saw Henri fidgeting and distracted, impatient to begin his talk.

That he is like some of us in his restlessness, though, is only the smaller half of the story. The transformative part is that he is aware of this, is honest about it, and seeks to find a way to understand and respond to it. This approach to a fragmented, anxious, drifting form of existence is what forms for him the structure of “the spiritual life.” It is in the very hunger for more that our hope lies.

The beginning of the spiritual life is often difficult not only because the powers which cause us to worry are so strong but also because the presence of God’s spirit seems barely noticeable. If, however, we are faithful to our disciplines, a new hunger will be made known. This new hunger is the first sign of God’s presence. When we remain attentive [to it] we will be lead always deeper into the kingdom although at times it may not seem it. There, to our joyful surprise, we will discover that all things are being made new (*Making All Things New*).

In the search for God at the heart of our lives Henri—in seeking solidarity with his readers—sought to state clearly the feelings, problems, and results we could expect in the search to move from worry to wakefulness, from a sense of fragmentation to a place of peace and refreshment deeper within ourselves.

In *Making All Things New*, his little classic on responding to God's invitation to live more spiritually, first he helps us recognize our urge to move more deeply into a relationship with God while simultaneously recognizing that we are confused as to which direction we should go. His caution to us is that we not merely feel the call to live more deeply and just stop there: "As long as we have only a vague inner feeling of discontent with our present way of being, and only an indefinite desire for 'things spiritual,' our lives will continue to stagnate in a generalized melancholy. . . . It is this mood of recognition that prevents us from actively searching for life of the Spirit."

The mood, he believes, can be counteracted by appreciating more deeply the problems which plague us when we are not rooted in the Spirit and open to the buffeting of life. Reflecting on his own busy life he points out that even though we move faster and farther we never seem to catch up. People never seem satisfied with us and we get resentful. We are always planning for the eventualities that we fear will befall us. Yet, our preoccupations with tomorrow never allow us to enjoy what is before us now.

Because our minds and hearts are filled with such worries, we only seem to get fleeting periods of peace within. We are unconnected, alienated, "never at home in our [own] hearts." He recognized this in himself and asked us to ponder with him about the realities of our current fragmented life and to seriously embrace the question as to what more there might be for us:

While teaching, lecturing, and writing about the importance of solitude, inner freedom, and peace of mind, I kept stumbling over my own compulsions and illusions. . . . What was turning my vocation to be a witness to God's love into a tiring job? . . . Maybe I spoke more about God than with him. . . . Maybe I was more concerned about the praise of men and women than the love of God. Maybe I was slowly becoming a prisoner of

people's expectations instead of a man liberated by divine promises. . . .

I started to see how much I had indeed fallen in love with my own compulsions and illusions, and how much I needed to step back and wonder, "Is there a quiet stream underneath the fluctuating affirmations and rejections of my little world? Is there a still point where my life is anchored and from which I can reach out with hope and courage and confidence (*The Genesee Diary*)?"

Henri saw then both his desire and ours to go deeper, to have a strong spiritual center within us. We can see this in his reflection on the attitude of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, who is the author of the classic treatise, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

For Brother Lawrence, to live in the presence of God was his only concern. In the presence of God, life became very simple for him. This simpleness of life, however, was the result of a long struggle. . . . [T]o be free for God asks for discipline, and the practice of the presence of God asks for determination to let go from the many worries. . . . Brother Lawrence's deep conviction [is] that prayer is not saying prayers but [is] a way of living [in] which all we do becomes prayer.

BUT . . .

Despite this calling, most of us are still confused. We don't know what direction to go to let our knowledge *about* God become a personal relationship *with* God. As Henri recognized, we often feel the distance from God rather than a Divine sense of intimacy.

During these feelings of alienation from the Spirit of God, we even look at Jesus through a negative lens. We feel, well of course Jesus had an intimate relationship with God and felt the flow of the Spirit between them. After all, Jesus was God!

Henri sees the call to the spiritual life as a way to move from worry to wakefulness.

However, Henri reminds us in such instances that Jesus didn't cling to identity with God. He became human, had human emotions, and shared his story in human terms so we could see ourselves in him.

Once we dispose of the idea that being intimate with God is impossible, Henri alerts us to a second wave of discouragement that comes in the form of preoccupation:

More enslaving than our occupations, however, are our preoccupations. To be pre-occupied means to fill our time and place long before we are there. This is worrying in the more specific sense of the word. It is a mind filled with "ifs." We say to ourselves, "What if I get the flu? What if I lose my job? What if my child is not home on time? . . . All these "ifs" fill our minds with anxious thoughts and make us wonder constantly what to do and what to say in case something should happen in the future. Much, if not most, of our suffering is connected with these preoccupations. . . . Since we are always preparing for eventualities, we seldom fully trust the moment (*Making All Things New*).

In saying this, he is reflecting one of Mark Twain's wry comments: "My life has been filled with terrible misfortunes . . . most of which never happened." And, even if we are able to recognize what we are doing to ourselves, we live in a milieu which is so filled with

negativity and fabricated emergencies and induced needs, that we are convinced we don't have a chance.

Today, I think many would agree, when there is no dire news to report, the media searches the world over for sad events, situations which can be dramatized, and anxieties to be instilled. Simultaneously, the efforts of people to do good are portrayed as self-serving, insufficient, and transitory. In response, Henri sees the call to the spiritual life as a way to move from worry to wakefulness. And so, because of this, he compellingly has us face our "homelessness" and the way to come home through the discipline of prayer and community.

HOMELESSNESS

To Henri, homelessness was driven by a compulsive concern about the needs of others:

One of the most notable characteristics of worrying is that it fragments our lives. The many things to do, to think about, to plan for, the many people to remember, to visit, or to talk with, the many causes to attack or defend, all these pull us apart and make us lose our center. Worrying causes us to be "all over the place," but seldom at home (*Making All Things New*).

It also involved a sense of boredom and resentment that arises when we are so busy, as well as in our desire to cover these feelings under a veneer of "niceness." He felt when we are uncentered and not living spiritually, our lives seem out of control. The faster we run, the less we feel we accomplish or are appreciated. Instead we feel abused and used and this takes its toll.

John Eudes Bamberger commented on this to Henri: "It is not so surprising that you are easily depressed and tired," he said. "Much of your energy is invested in keeping your hostilities and aggression under control and in working on your appearance of gentleness and kindness" (*The Genesee Diary*).

Henri himself saw this as a response to the human fear of isolation, a fear which drove him to seek the approval of his father and so many others, even though he knew better. What kept him doing it? What keeps us in such an unhealthy way of living and relating? Henri responds simply: a distortion of a

recognition of the reality that we do need to be part of a meaningful community of relationship:

In interpersonal relations . . . [our] disconnectedness is experienced as loneliness. When we are lonely we perceive ourselves as isolated individuals surrounded, perhaps, by many people, but not really part of any supporting or nurturing community. . . out of all this pervading loneliness many cry, "Is there anyone who really cares? Is there anyone who can take away my inner sense of isolation? Is there anyone with whom I can feel at home?"

It is this paralyzing sense of separation that constitutes the core of much human suffering. We can take a lot of physical and even mental pain when we know that it truly makes us a part of the life we live together in this world. But when we feel cut off from the human family, we quickly lose heart (*Making All Things New*).

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Another element of the spiritual life that dovetails with having a deeper sense of community is the call to know ourselves more fully. Henri not only emphasized this but was also appreciative that a critical element of the process of self-knowledge is commitment to self-discovery of unfamiliar aspects of ourselves. There are many ways to do this of course. Opening oneself up to someone we love, prayer, reflection, sharing personal stories with friends, being in tune with the feedback we receive each day from those we encounter, therapy, spiritual direction and journaling are several approaches. To be sure, Henri used them all and we can see some of the fruits of this in his writings.

As we are treated to the results and process of his efforts at self-discovery in his writings, we must be careful not to jump to the conclusion that all he shared represents all he felt. Otherwise, we will misinterpret who Henri was and more importantly, be deluded into thinking the process of self-discovery is easier and more straightforward than it actually is. A good example of this is *The Genesee Diary*.

Of all his books, this one has been very important in my own journey. Just as I found Merton's edited diaries of life in the Trappist monastery a balm to my soul, so too I have found this one's tone, approach, and content especially reassuring during times of doubt and struggle. There is something about the monastic cadence, spiritual centeredness ("conversion of manners") and simple honesty that helps put my soul on the right track.

I found the fact that Henri's guide was not only an abbot but also a psychiatrist intriguing. Yet, unlike many of my colleagues in mental health, this particular guide seemed especially clear and direct in his interventions—something I now try to model in as gentle a way as possible in my own efforts at mentoring.

Consequently, when I had a chance to meet Dom John Eudes Bamburgh I brought up his intervention style. I was interested in his insights on both Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen.

After we were introduced, we took a walk in the cloistered area behind the monastery. It was a leisurely stroll in which the abbot spoke a bit about his own decision to choose monastic life over that of remaining a physician, some of his impressions of Thomas Merton whom he saw as a truly remarkable man, and several reflections on Henri Nouwen whom he viewed with a sharp understanding and gentle appreciation of the goodness of the man.

At one point when he paused, I teased him about his style of dealing with Henri as reported by Nouwen in *The Genesee Diary*. "Abbot, I found your interventions to be gentle but surprisingly quite direct," I said. In response, he stopped, turned and faced me. His look seemed to say, "Oh, so you think I was too forthright and candid do you?" Then he smiled slightly in a mischievous way and said, "One of the monks in my abbey who read *The Genesee Diary* told me that I let Henri off pretty easy. But I told him that I really didn't. It's just that in the published diary, Henri left out all the really good stuff!"

Henri was more of a psychologist than people usually realized. By that I mean he knew the value of self-discovery and of discretion in sharing insights about himself. He knew the need to be painfully honest in looking at his familiar faults and defensiveness. He saw the real value in vulnerability and the danger in believing only the positive traits and impressions people projected on him as a prominent spiritual guide and well-known author.

The belief is that persons with real problems or sins can become truly holy and compassionate beings.

He also saw great value in sharing his foibles and repeated stumblings with others. He even opened himself to criticism in *The Genesee Diary*, for instance, when he let people see the basic challenges and apparent areas where there was some lack of knowledge of certain spiritual practices in his approach to God. Yet, this was wonderful for his readers; it allowed us to appreciate that Henri—even given his accomplishments as a spiritual guide—was *one of us*. Given his deep insights and ability to employ the learning that is possible in taking dead end journeys in the spiritual life, he is all the more valuable to us as a guide. As Thomas Merton once noted, in the spiritual life we are always beginners, always in over our heads. In communicating this well, Henri gives us the courage to better accept this reality and not get discouraged when we fail again . . . and *again*. So, painful self-discovery, vulnerability, the willingness to be seen as a perennial novice in the spiritual life and his understanding of his inner motivations and emotional failings are a help to us all.

However, one element that is also present in *The Genesee Diary* and his other writings, which is often overlooked, is his *discretion*. Part of the reason for this is that people undervalue the role that psychology played in the way he approached himself, others, and even God.

Henri had a knack of sharing just enough of himself and his journey to help people identify with him so they could better explore and understand their own lives. However, he held back from making the mistake made by many spiritual writers of going too far in his self-revelation. When a spiritual writer/lecturer/guide does this, the danger is that others will become more centered on the guide than on themselves.

The goal of all spiritual guidance—be it in writing, presentation, or personal mentoring—is to help persons seeking self knowledge. This goal may even be necessary to set the stage for honesty and growth in the encounter. However, discretion is necessary or the process may take a wrong turn and get focused erroneously on the guide instead.

We can learn much from Henri Nouwen's seemingly natural but actually quite disciplined processes of self-discovery and discretion. Brutally honest, eternally hopeful—even during the dark times he readily shares—he also values putting these discoveries at the service of others. Yet, and this is the careful psychologist which he modeled for us, he shows that all of us need to share our insights and feelings in a way that is of service to other's needs not our own. With this simple piece of knowledge, self-discovery can free us to be more transparent and non-defensive in our prayer, especially when we are called to guide others. Whereas, without it, narcissism and poor ego boundaries masquerade as openness, and little good is actually done for the other person seeking our support.

A CONTINUOUS BLOOMER

Finally, a special gift that Henri modeled for us is that naming our growing edges is part of the ongoing spiritual process and that knowing our sins and flaws can actually be a source of a deeper relationship with God. Buddhism also speaks about the wonderful possibilities that come about when we use the “weeds” in our life to make compost to fertilize our interior garden. The belief is that persons with real problems or sins can become truly holy and compassionate beings. When this happens their presence in the world is gracious and grace-filled not in spite of their past life but *because* of it.

I have also seen this in counselors and spiritual masters who were very wounded leaders but didn't run away from their experiences. They walked into their darkness and let it teach them. The darkness didn't lift any faster because of their willingness to be with it. Far from it. The pain, loneliness and alienation were very intense. Yet, eventually the darkness itself became—a la John of the Cross—new light for the next phase of their lives. The darkness itself became the loving face of God leading to new perspectives and more life-giving images of God.

Although Henri had written and given public lectures on the spiritual life, those who knew him well saw his ingrained (characterological) defensive style rear its head again and again. They also saw that even during all of this, God was using him. And so, his value as a guide was not because he had it all together—far from it! Instead, it was because he was both humble and hopeful that he was open to being used by God—especially during the last ten years of his life.

Someone very close to Henri felt that although he had many wonderful insights about his life and what it meant to be a true, free person for others, he was in fact a very late bloomer. For instance, for most of his life he lived a life in the shadow of his father with whom he never seemed to feel at ease, and from whom he never felt loved, respected or accepted. The setting for Henri's early years certainly didn't help. Royalty would visit his father, scholars would come for consultation—his father was a formidable and famous man. In reaction, Henri sometimes tried to deal with this pull to please and be accepted by his father through achieving great success while knowing in his heart he should be embracing his ordinariness. When I visited him at Harvard he lamented about people who were caught on the ladder of success there. "They're all depressed," he would say to me. It made him even more convinced that he must let go of all titles and simply be *Henri*.

During this brief visit to Harvard I asked for some direction for myself and he helped me more than I think he ever imagined. Amidst his troubles while at Harvard (and as I previously noted, possibly *because* of them), he could understand and touch me in my own journey toward self-acceptance and self-love. His problems were my problems. His optimism and direction were mine as well. Looking back on that encounter I felt we were collaborating spiritually in looking at my life even though I could sense his presence in my life at that moment as an *abba*.

Maybe because of this significant interaction for me and the simple power of the honesty in his writings, I prefer to see Henri as a "continuous bloomer." Moreover, I think the spiritual flower within him was the greatest prior to his death and that the back and forth interaction with his own honest experiences of himself, others and God give us hope that it is not with a major final breakthrough that we find God. Instead we are constantly on the beach head of the "kin-dom" of God *now* and that the spiral of self-knowledge,

self-discovery, and self-love moves back and forth repeatedly throughout our entire life.

We are not born again one time, but experience a constant "born again-ness" that allows us always to see life as a loving journey in which learning about ourselves, God and others never ceases. Not to see it this way is to set the stage for much unnecessary discouragement—something Henri experienced in his dark moments and which he shared in ways that could help us reach for God. Because as Henri tried to teach us in his writings, lectures, and most importantly in the way he lived his life, the journey toward God is grace-filled—sometimes in darkness, sometimes in light, but always *together*. He knew the meaning of collaborative spiritual direction and because of this we are all richer.

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GREENING THE SPIRIT

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.



In the Northern Hemisphere, our calendars inform us that we have moved from the dark and chill of winter into the season of spring, the time of lengthening, strengthening sunlight and greening of plant life. As new life makes itself felt in the garden, our liturgical calendars remind us that we are celebrating the mysteries of the seasons of Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. These mysteries culminate in an invitation to experience the fullness of life as we open ourselves to the greening action of the Spirit whose sevenfold gifts are poured out abundantly upon us.

How are we to understand this greening action? What might be of use to us in helping us experience the green power of the Spirit's gifts in our lives? One avenue of approach might be to examine these gifts in conjunction with archetypal images and energies that have the potential to shed light on the transforming action of the Spirit in our lives. Although the work of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung is generally credited with stimulating our interest in the study of archetypes and their meaning, in truth, others, such as the German mystic Hildegard of Bingen, made use of such images to speak of the mysteries of the Spirit.

What is an archetype? We might think of an archetype as a form of numinous energy that is spiritual, supernatural, or mysterious and that arouses elevated or spiritual emotions. We might also think of an archetype as a pattern of basic significance, a skeletal concept that might be fleshed out in various ways. It is also possible to consider an archetype as an ordering principle of the unconscious. This is a facet that Jung developed in his theory of personality. He perceived the archetypes as centers or nodal points that are charged with energy and identified these ordering principles as complexes. Although we have tended to refer to these complexes in a negative way—for example, stating someone has a superiority complex or a mother complex—what Jung attempted to point out was that a particular archetype was especially active in an individual at a given time.

Ken Wilbur, a leader in the field of transpersonal psychology, indicated that archetypes belong to the design of the universe and, referring to various mystical traditions, he described them as vibrational. In his opinion, the archetypes are radiant patterns or points of light out of which the material world condenses. His description bears a strong relationship to Hildegard's visions of the Living Light and her insistence that the vibrations of her music brought the singer and listener closer to the divine.

While these descriptions of the archetypes might sound somewhat esoteric, in fact, we make use of such images in everyday life. The heroes and heroines of Roman and Greek mythology were personifications of certain archetypes and their names have crept into our descriptive language. For example, we make reference to Atlas when we describe worried or despondent persons as “carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders.” We might refer to a person of unusual strength as Hercules (male) or as an Amazon (female). We speak of people whose moods and emotions seem to shift with extreme rapidity as having mercurial personalities, named for the god Mercury whose swiftness made him the messenger of the gods. And of course, the popular book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, highlights the different approaches to life taken by men and women by identifying them with the god of war (Mars) and the goddess of love and beauty (Venus).

Use of archetypal imagery is not merely a way of enriching our speech, however. The primary function of an archetype is to help us develop into full human persons. We call upon archetypal imagery in times of transition or identity change, not only those brought on by crisis or trauma, but in the normal course of our development. For example, a woman negotiating the transition from being single to becoming a wife might invoke the protection of the goddess-wife of Zeus who is known to us primarily by her Roman name, Juno. The month of June is named in her honor and being a “June bride” was a way of asking her blessing as one took on the status of a married woman. A book by Jungian analyst Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., *Goddesses in Older Women*, introduces archetypes that are active in women over age fifty and offer assistance in activating and harnessing the energies and potentials that come with aging.

One book I found particularly helpful in studying archetypal imagery was Carol S. Pearson's *Awakening the Heroes Within*. While her work has been criticized for using masculine images only, I think her ideas have much to offer as I see these archetypes and the energies they represent as able to be clothed in male or female form. Pearson lists twelve archetypal images: the Innocent, the Orphan, the Warrior and the Caregiver in addition to the Seeker, the Destroyer, the Lover and the Creator. She also identified the Ruler, the Magician, the Sage and the Fool.

The church, with its roots in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds, did not hesitate to make use of archetypal imagery. Our array of saints may be thought of as embodying archetypal images. The image of the martyr, male and female, is well represented. We have Warrior saints such as Michael the Archangel and Joan of Arc. We have King/Queen archetypes in King Louis of France and Elizabeth of Hungary. We have the Innocent represented not only by the Holy Innocents but also by Maria Goretti, Bernadette of Lourdes, and the children of Fatima. The Caregiver archetype is well represented, frequently by women who founded religious communities whose members work in the fields of education, health care, and social service. We might think of American-born Elizabeth Seton as one illustration of the Caregiver while Mother Teresa is an

These gifts are great and powerful
manifestations of archetypal energies.

example in our own time. On the male side, there stands Don Bosco who worked with orphans; the members of his religious community continue to work with youth in all parts of the world today. And we are not without our Seekers, such as Thomas Merton, and Sages, such as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Catherine of Siena, to name only a few. It is important to recall, however, that, although we might embody the qualities of a particular archetype at a given point in time, we are not limited to that archetype alone. As we mature and as our circumstances change, we are called to develop the good qualities of many different archetypes.

THE TRANSFORMING SPIRIT

How might the archetypal images assist us in the transformational work of greening our spirits? We might begin by inviting in the archetype of the Magician whose work is to transform lesser realities into better realities, to align the true self with the cosmos and to encourage us to find our personal power. As we claim our power, the gift of baptismal grace, and embrace our vocations to become the image of God, we create a certain "magic;" we change and grow and, in the process, enrich the world around us. As a psychotherapist, I have been privileged to witness moments of transformation. I do not equate such transformation with any particular type of change, for example, becoming more assertive, although such change might, in fact, be beneficial. What has been transformative is generally a matter of the person discovering within his or her own being the mystery by which life arises renewed out of painful losses and past mistakes. This sort of transformation generally entails

coming to an appreciation of the mystery of oneself and one's place in the cosmic order. Transformation is a sensing of the mystery of God's Holy Wisdom active in one's own life and in the world. It is a sense of being unified within oneself and of being at home within the depths of one's own being, echoing the words of the first creation, "and God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10). Above all, this transformation reflects an experience of the power of the Spirit, so that after a period of darkness and dryness, one is made moist and green again.

If we look at the life of Hildegard of Bingen, she herself experienced both physical and spiritual sickness that was related to her drying up, i.e., her refusal to write and share the images of her visions. She attempted to deny or avoid the Magician within for a long time, perhaps because she feared the isolation that so frequently is the lot of those who follow the Magician's path. Her waiting period may have served as a time of incubation, however, during which her ego strength and the clarity of her visions grew stronger. At any rate, Hildegard experienced the full outpouring of the Spirit in an awakening of her green power, once she owned and shared her creation-centered spiritual experience. From then on she made use of her Spirit-fueled energy to produce wonderfully creative works in art, music, medicine and poetry, writing to various bishops, healing, organizing and founding her monastery. Although most of us are unlikely to follow Hildegard's path, I would urge you to take a few moments to consider the events or periods in your lives that have been transformational and from which you have emerged a new creation.

Transformation, while a mystery of grace, is not something reserved for life after death. We are invited to enter into the greening power of the Spirit and, as Paul tells us in his Letter to the Romans, "The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness" (8:26). While the action of the Spirit is highly individual, nevertheless there is a communal aspect that we might do well to consider. Through the sacrament of confirmation, for example, we each have been blessed with the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are great and powerful manifestations of archetypal energies of the soul that serve as patterns upon which we can build our lives. They are sources of inspiration given to aid us in working toward our final transformation in the

Spirit. Like archetypes, the gifts of the Spirit are invisible but are most noticeable in our times of transition, those moments when we are most in need of their power. We might recognize their presence by the fruits they produce in our lives. Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, identifies these fruits as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22).

HOLY AWE

As we examine the gifts of the Spirit, we turn first to the gift that was once named “fear of the Lord” but that is more appropriately called the gift of holy awe these days. This is the foundational gift of the Spirit for, as the author of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) tells us, “To fear the Lord is the root of Wisdom” (1:18). This gift is one of reverence, respect, and devoted obedience in the face of God’s creative power. Awe is an act of insight into a meaning greater than ourselves. It is a way of being in rapport with the mystery of all reality. Abraham Heschel, a noted Hebrew scholar, speaks of wonder or radical amazement as a pre-requisite for an authentic awareness of that which is. In radical amazement, we face “the great things and unsearchable, the wondrous things without number” (Job 5:9). But not only do the things outside ourselves evoke amazement, our own beings fill us with awe: “It was you who created my inmost self and put me together in my mother’s womb; for all these mysteries, I thank you: for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works” (Psalm 139:14).

This gift of the Spirit relates to the archetype of the Innocent who approaches the world with purity of belief and vision. Awe empowers us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine. It is the vision of mystics and poets such as Gerard Manly Hopkins who reminded us in his poem entitled *God’s Grandeur*: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.” Holy awe fosters a sense of trust and optimism that is not based on denial of problems or a naive view of life. It encourages us to remain loyal to God, rooted in faith and hope even in hours of suffering and pain because the eyes of the Innocent are able to see the divine even in the darkness of night.

EMPOWERING COURAGE

We might next consider the gift of fortitude, a gift of holy might, strength, power and courage. This gift is associated with the Warrior archetype and enables us to face the trials and dangers of life that we experience on the physical and spiritual levels. It gives us the ability to stand firm in times of adversity thanks to our confidence in God whose saving power is with us.

Although the phrase has fallen into disfavor in our time, there is a long history of invoking the “Lord of power and might.” Reading the scriptures, we find numerous examples in the First Testament in which the Lord (Adonai) made his might known, either to punish his people for their sins or to protect them from their enemies. The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt was one of their foundational experiences of the might of the Lord. Knowing that their salvation was worked by the right hand of the Lord that struck with power, they were inspired to sing: “The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation.” (Exodus 15:2)

The gift of fortitude or holy might was also bestowed on individuals, especially those who held leadership roles. We read in 1 Samuel 16:13, for example, that “the spirit of the Lord came mightily on David” at the time Samuel anointed him and after that anointing he was inspired to go out and slay Goliath, the enemy of the Israelites. Mary of Nazareth drew upon this tradition of invoking the might of the Lord as we hear in her Magnificat “For the Mighty One has done great things for me” and again, “He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:49, 51-52).

The Pentecost event, as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles, demonstrates that a prominent effect of the coming of the Spirit was the elimination of fear and the creation of courage in the hearts of the apostles so that they were able to speak and witness to the power of the risen Jesus. Fortitude also took on a spiritual aspect. In the Letter to the Ephesians, for example, Paul prayed that “according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit” (3:16). However, this emphasis on spiritual strength did not negate the fact that the gift of fortitude could also be present and

active in everyday life. Colossians reminds us of the promise of the Spirit's gift: "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience" (1:11-12).

To cast the effects of this gift in modern terms, fortitude may strengthen us in establishing a sense of identity and in guarding our boundaries. We can use this gift to battle our inner enemies: our sloth, our denial of uncomfortable realities, and our jealousy of others. This gift also assists us to move beyond simple self-interest and to embrace the common good in recognition that our good is intimately linked with the good of all. The development of the gift of fortitude within us also leads to a ripening of the fruits of the Spirit, especially the fruits of patience, joy and gentleness—for only those whose inner Warriors are strong can afford to deal with the trials of life in ways that promote peace rather than escalate conflict. As Elizabeth Dreyer, professor of religious studies and author, noted, the Spirit empowers us in the difficult task of living in unity, loving and forgiving one another.

WITH TENDERNESS AND JUSTICE

A third gift of the Spirit is piety, the call to adoption, the call to holiness that inspires us to live in right relationship as sons and daughters of God who is both mother and father to us. This gift comes to redeem and heal the Orphan archetype that is activated by all those life experiences in which we feel abandoned, betrayed, victimized, neglected or disillusioned. Through the gift of piety, we realize a profound sense of belonging, knowing ourselves as children of the universe and beloved sons and daughters of the Holy One.

Piety opens us to an intimate, uniquely personal relationship with God who is father and mother. It helps us experience the reality that we are in relationship with a God who treats us with tenderness: "Does a woman forget her baby at the breast or fail to cherish the child of her womb? Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you" (Isaiah 49:15-16). We might also think of other images of piety such as Jesus calling God "Abba, Father," and teaching us to do the same through the Lord's Prayer.

The gift of piety does not allow for a sentimental approach to Christianity, however, for it is rooted in justice, a striving in all situations to treat every person as having great dignity and value as a child of God. In this age of ecological awareness, I would also suggest that we consider justice not merely in terms of humans but also in terms of the whole of creation for we all come from the womb of Wisdom who is mother of all things and whose renewing power makes us all green.

How might piety and its associated virtue of justice manifest their influence in our lives? The practice of fidelity lived out as faithfulness to our religious obligations and practices might be one way to exercise the gift of piety, as we owe God worship and praise.

Elizabeth Dryer relates that St. Bonaventure views piety as a gift that nurtures a life free from pride, envy, anger, and harsh judgment, fostering instead a life that is characterized by mercy, meekness, purity of heart, and peace. Truthfulness informed by the spirit of patience and charity when dealing with others is a means of living a life characterized by piety. Concern for issues of social justice and the practice of eco-justice are other ways in which the gift of piety can be observed at work touching our world, inspiring us to live in right relationship with others while transforming our lives. As Bonaventure reminds us, piety calls us to live as one body, avoiding acrimony and division, showing concern and compassion for one another.

HUMBLE CARING

The gift of counsel empowers us to make decisions in the practical situations of our lives in the light of the Spirit. This is a gift of intuition and discernment that assists us to hear the voice of the Holy One, to see the direction we ought to take and to open ourselves to the Spirit's action in our lives. This gift matures with us as we grow in wisdom, age, and grace. It is a gift that can be shared with others, and one way we manifest it is through mentoring. As young persons, we might find ourselves in the role of peer mentors or mediators. As we age, we might exercise the gift of counsel by using the wisdom of experience gained over the course of a lifetime to help others discern their path.

The gift of counsel evokes the image of the Caregiver, the archetype of generosity and mercy. Any time we take care of a person in our roles of parent or

nurse, or help another grow and develop through such roles as teacher or leader, the Caregiver is present. This archetype is related to generativity as its presence helps us build up healthy families and communities.

Prudence, one of the virtues extolled in the Wisdom literature of the First Testament, is related to the gift of counsel. This virtue serves to guide us as we strive to embody the Caretaker archetype. It assists us in regulating the extent to which we care for others, guarding us from burnout and from the temptation to overindulge those in our care, thus creating dependency rather than fostering growth and health. It also assists in encouraging us to exercise appropriate care for ourselves, physically and spiritually, by guiding us to establish priorities and maintain healthy boundaries.

The gift of counsel also comes to our aid in sudden and unexpected situations where we would not have sufficient time to think carefully about the choices put before us. Having made a practice of listening to the inspiration of the Spirit, at moments of crisis we are able to rely on counsel to guide us aright.

How then might we dispose ourselves to strengthen within us the gift of counsel? One way is through humility, recognizing our dependence on the Spirit to make right choices. The virtue of modesty would encourage us not to overestimate our knowledge of what God's will is in our life or, even more importantly, what God wills for others. Humility and modesty open us to learn to discern God's will through counsel received from others rather than relying solely on our own insights at all times. Those who engage in the practice of spiritual direction and offer guidance to others must be especially attuned to fostering the gift of counsel. Patience, another of the fruits of the Spirit, also comes into play here. We often must wait for the time of ripening, the time when we will be able to see clearly the resolution of certain dilemmas in which we find ourselves. Developing the prayer of active listening to the voice of the Spirit opens us to attending to the inspiration of counsel.

SEEKING MEANING

An examination of the gift of knowledge directs our attention to the archetype of the Seeker. Those who embrace the way of the Seeker are called to be

Developing the prayer of active listening to the voice of the Spirit opens us to attending to the inspiration of counsel.

true to a deeper and higher truth, to respond to the summons to function at a higher level, to find a way that has significance and depth, to seek for the meaning of their lives, or as one of the great myths would express it, to seek for the Holy Grail of their existence.

The gift of knowledge leads us to a full and mature knowledge of the things of God. It produces in us deep trust and sureness about God and the truths of Christian revelation. It enables us to "know," i.e., to experience God and to recognize the divine action in us and in our world as purposeful, not simply random. This gift illumines our human intellects, for all knowledge is a gift of the Spirit. Holy knowledge, however, also encourages us to make a total, personal commitment in faith, thus surpassing human knowledge. It teaches us to recognize true wisdom as opposed to worldly wisdom for, as St Paul instructs us, the truths of faith often appear foolish to the wise of this world and those who appear worthless and of little account are wise in their knowledge of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 2).

If we accept the gift of the Spirit's knowledge, we are soon obliged to acknowledge the limits of human knowing for as the psalmist reminds us (Psalm 139:6), "Such knowledge is beyond my understanding, a height to which my mind cannot attain." We are obliged to acknowledge that there are "facts" that cannot be proven by hard science or mathematical equations. Exercising the gift of knowledge requires that we develop a receptive, listening heart, one that is attuned to the vibrational elements that Ken Wilbur spoke of in reference to archetypal energies. Willingness to follow paths of faith-filled intuition and inspiration leads us into the realm of mystery where the insights offered by rational thought, valuable as they might be, do not

Wisdom empowers us to do the will of God in all things.

suffice. We are called upon to seek the meaning of events, of life itself, that are often hidden from the eyes of the intellect alone. The ability to discern, to weigh and measure on the scales of the Gospel of Jesus, rather than on the scales of Wall Street or Main Street, is an element of the gift of knowledge. It means to see clearly, not with our earthly eyes but with the eyes of faith that are grounded in trust and the loving kindness of our God.

AN ENLIGHTENED HEART

The traditional definition of the gift of understanding speaks of it as enlightening our minds and hearts with divine truth. Understanding, like holy knowledge, sharpens our spiritual sight so that we might see God in all things. We might wish to think of it as a gift of spiritual perception or a gift of insight that allows us to grasp the hidden meaning of spiritual things. When the energies of understanding are active, there comes increased depth in prayer, a renewed appreciation of the sacraments, a deeper understanding of the scriptures—in a word, interior growth and development.

The archetypal energies of the Sage, whose goal is attainment of truth and understanding, come into play here. To achieve these goals, the Sage must devote time and energy to discovering knowledge, finding wisdom, and seeking enlightenment in order to perceive the reality that lies beyond external appearances. The Sage is the archetype who is active in those moments of truth that illuminate our lives. Sage energy brings us those deep, sometimes painful, insights that reveal our own particular brand of egoism and show us how it has

limited our lives and curtailed our freedom. Sage energy also offers us assistance in letting go of ego concerns, in facing the inconvenient but necessary truths that set us free and bring us to a humility that is ennobling. Solomon, for example, acknowledged humbly that he was only a man who was “weak and short-lived” and, in that moment of truth he pleaded with God that Wisdom, “she who understands what is pleasing in your sight” be granted him (Wisdom 9:5, 9) so that he might lead his people in paths pleasing to the Lord.

Many of us come to develop Sage energy later in life than did Solomon. One excellent opportunity for this sort of development comes as we engage in a thorough review of life. Through the review of life, we often come to a deeper knowledge of the truth about ourselves and achieve a compassionate understanding of our strengths and weaknesses as we have used them and grappled with them during the course of our lifetimes. With the benefit of a long perspective, we come to a deeper understanding of others who played significant roles in our lives, seeing them, perhaps, through the lens of merciful love. Prayer tends to deepen when Sage energy is present and, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we may find our hearts burning within us as we experience the words of scripture enhanced by the action of the Spirit’s gift of understanding.

FINDING GOD IN ALL THINGS

We now turn our attention to the gift of wisdom, considered to be the highest of the gifts for it is a spiritual state we come to when we become able to make judgments about everything on the basis of a deep personal union with God in love. The gift of wisdom is an experiential knowledge that comes to us from our perception of God’s presence in all of creation. This gift imparts to us the ability to make right judgments in ordinary and mystical matters. Just as the gift of understanding gave us the ability to see God, wisdom empowers us to do the will of God in all things. An intimate sharing in the life of God, this gift builds us into loving dwelling places of God that are founded on the seven pillars of wisdom. According to various traditions, the pillars may be identified with

themes from the beatitudes: poverty of spirit (humility), mournfulness (hating evil), meekness, seeking righteousness (obedience), mercy (compassion), purity (freedom from corruption), and peacemaking. Bonaventure identified these pillars as chastity, innocence of mind, moderation in words, docility, generosity, maturity in judgment, and simplicity of intention. If we think in terms of traditional spirituality, full development of the gift leads us into what Teresa of Avila called the "prayer of union" or as Paul tells us, "we are those who have the mind of Christ!" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Given the powerful energies of this gift, it is not surprising that two archetypes, the Ruler and the Fool, are needed to explore it fully. The Ruler embodies that aspect of wisdom that, in ordering all things, strives to achieve harmony and balance in our lives and in our world. The Ruler in us is a realist who is not drawn into fruitless illusions about the world or the self. The Ruler is a symbol of wholeness and the birthing of the true self, the image of God within. The energies of the Ruler provide us with the willingness and the ability to take full responsibility for our lives and help us find ways to express our deeper selves in the world.

The archetype of the Fool, on the other hand, suggests a principle of wholeness that is entirely beyond the individual ego. The Fool speaks of psychological wholeness that brings joy, liberation, and freedom. In our mature years, it is the Fool that allows us to give up living life based on terms of achievement and goal setting, striving to "make it" according to societal standards or some inner drive. Instead, empowered by the Fool's energy, we permit ourselves to enjoy life for its own sake with gratitude for the gift we have been given. This aspect of wisdom is also associated with the divine sense of humor for the Fool often emerges in our lives at the moments that seem most painful, reminding us that life is sweet and contains seeds of joy, even at its worst.

CHRIST WITHIN

As this article comes to a close we might wish to consider two other of the great archetypes, the Lover and the Creator. Both of these archetypes and the

energies they embody are images of the Spirit whose coming we celebrate on Pentecost and whose gifts we open ourselves to receive. The Spirit as Lover and Creator gifts us with a radical self-acceptance that gives birth to our true selves and transforms us into who we are called to be, the image of God, the Christ within. As we rejoice in the return of spring to our world, may we find ourselves caught up in praise and gratitude for the Spirit who is greening the gardens of our hearts.

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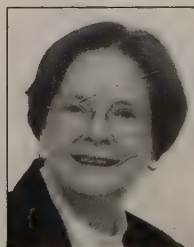
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BLESSED THE *Week*

James Torrens, S.J.



As I write this in mid-January, the Church, at the daily Mass, is once more highlighting the Letter to the Hebrews. I remember, in my long-ago theology studies, giving special attention to Hebrews, in the commentary of Ceslas Spicq. Yet only now does this unusual treatise, or homily, snap into some kind of focus for me.

Hebrews, as signaled by the title, is addressed to people wholly conversant with priesthood in the Mosaic covenant. That means Jewish Christians, probably including members of the Levitical priesthood. The center of attention in Hebrews is the sacrificial priesthood of Jesus in its earthly and, above all, heavenly phases. It treats of the offering made once and for all by Jesus for the sinful people. Before him, the ancient offering, enacted by a series of all-too-mortal priests in holocausts and other animal offerings, could not be very lasting or fully effective. Jesus fulfilled the promise inherent in this serial priesthood with a worthier offering, the sacrifice of himself, and he did so as a much more enduring, that is, everlasting, celebrant.

In what it says of the heavenly sanctuary where Christ ministers on our behalf, Hebrews can sound very hieratic and otherworldly. Jesus offers what he once endured, interceding for us. The Introduction to Hebrews in *The New American Bible* sums up the earthly stage of this priesthood: "Jesus as high priest expiated sin

and was faithful to God with the faithfulness of God's own son." By this faithfulness he enacted salvation for us. The latter half of the letter is strong on exhortation to this same faithfulness, giving every reason for us to keep faith with our forefather and pioneer in the faith however much it cost. The famous "cloud of witnesses" to faith, modeled on Chapters 44-49 of Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), appears here (11:1).

What especially struck me this time in reading Hebrews was the emphatic humanness—read "weakness, frailty"—of this divine person in the priestly role. We are not talking about an action solemnly and impressively staged; we are talking about something that physically hurt and drained the one offering. The person officiating, as the writer explains, has to be imperfect. He must be subject to hunger, fatigue, frustration, error of judgment and mocking opposition. That is the paradox. Why so? Because he was doing this for men and women "he is not ashamed to call brothers" (2:11), to heal their radical imperfection. The high priest is "made perfect" by his acceptance of what he is called to, grueling though it be. Therefore, *Hebrews* says, referring to the initiative of God the Almighty, "it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering" (2:10).

What the suffering entailed is brought home to us in the paragraph that to me has always spoken piercingly of the Agony in the Garden:

In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:7-10).

These words put into a capsule the whole doctrinal message of Hebrews. In the phrase "the days of his flesh" we hear how the Savior's experience links to that of all readers of the letter. "Take care, brothers,"

the author says to those who daily endure the test of their faithfulness. Never flag or recoil. "Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested" (2:18; cf. also 4:15).

Those of us in the flesh are all too conscious of our mortality. We need emboldening above all in that regard, and our once imperfect high priest goes before us to bring this about. "Since the children share in blood and flesh, he likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life" (2:14-15). "So let us confidently approach the throne of grace," says the unknown author, because there, behind the veil, we have "the anchor of the soul," Jesus, who entered on our behalf (4:16 and 6:19).

In the spring of 1972, the above considerations spurred Father Michael Buckley, S.J., rector of the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, to propose them in a letter to the men approaching ordination. What he asked about them seemed to reverse the normal question of the ceremony, "Do you know this man to be worthy?" Buckley asked instead, "Is this man weak enough to be a priest? Is this man deficient enough so that he can't ward off significant suffering from his life, so that he lives with a certain amount of failure, so that he feels what it is to be an average man?" He alludes explicitly to the teaching of Hebrews that in such deficiency "the efficacy of the ministry and priesthood of Christ lies."

By "weakness" Buckley is not speaking necessarily of the experience of sin, though that may certainly enter in, but rather of "a particular liability to suffering." The kind of suffering he has in mind is "a profound sense of inability both to do and to protect; an inability, even after great effort, to author, perform, effect what we have wanted or with the success we would have wanted; an inability to secure one's own future, to protect oneself, to live with clarity and assurance or to ward off shame and suffering."

Ask some of the priests who have been falsely accused of sexual abuse, or even rightly accused of a moment of passion early in their ministry, what the above means. They will have no trouble telling. Buckley goes to the heart of the matter: "The priest must . . . be liable to suffering, weak as a man, because he must become what he touches—the body of

Christ.... It is the liability of Christ to suffering, his ability to be broken and shed, that both makes his priesthood effective and his Eucharist possible." To verify, read Georges Bernanos', *The Diary of a Country Priest*. Read any other authentic fiction or discourse about the ministerial life.

Theologically Buckley's message chimes with that of Saint Paul, "We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). The whole of Second Corinthians elaborates this teaching. On the human level, Buckley reminds us, "weakness relates us profoundly with people; it allows us to feel with them the human condition, the human struggle and darkness and anguish which calls out for salvation."

None of the above—The Letter to the Hebrews, the message about "earthen vessels," even Father Buckley's letter—is limited in its application to priests or deacons. It is about how Jesus, the Son of God, came to minister to us all and in how fleshly a way he identified with us and how close he keeps to us in our frailties and limitations and addictions and even breakdowns. It is a message of assurance and empowerment. He knows what we are made of, since he was such himself. And we, every one of the baptized, sharing his priesthood despite our infirmity, share his Holy Spirit and his grace of faithfulness.

We are each and all called to the "obedience of faith," which we exercise when we respond to the will of God in the face of interior resistance. (Starting with Romans 1:5, Saint Paul uses this phrase often.) Struggling to do so in our weakness, we unite ourselves with the One who called himself "the son of man." And we remember that his holy mother was by no means spared, she of the seven sorrows, whose heart, as Simeon had foreseen, would be pierced. In her exposure to evil and her struggle to understand and her acute sensitivity—in her weakness—did her strength make itself plain.



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What They Felt in the Flesh

*Think of the young Gautama,
cooped up, overprotected.
True of God too,
greatness kept him apart.*

*One day Gautama said, "It's time.
Let's go take a look."
And God did too, as Jesus,
starting quite small.*

*They were both appalled.
The misery, the blind eyes,
so many birds of prey.
It gave them no rest.*

*Gautama under the bo tree,
illuminated, the Buddha,
grew wise to his goal,
to still the pain of desire.*

*Jesus, still wet with the Jordan,
anointed, the Christ,
went off to heal and teach,
the kingdom in person.*

*Followers flocked
with the best intentions,
and fell apart arguing.
The two shook their heads.*

*What they'd felt in the flesh
and wept for its failing
widened their arms at last
to a fear-not gesture.*

James Torrens, S.J.

St. Ignatius of Loyola

on Psychological and Spiritual Wholeness

Reverend Paul Coutinho, S.J.



After years of study, practice and experience, the celebrated psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961) concluded that every psychological problem needs a spiritual solution. He also came to believe that one's psychological health depends on one's connection with the infinite. In his famous book, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, he writes "Among all my patients in the second half of life, that is to say, over thirty five, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a spiritual outlook on life." Jung also makes another very insightful statement when he says, "The telling question of a person's life is their relationship to the infinite."

Jung's conclusions can help us reflect on the deep psychological insights that Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) had, especially those that he wrote down in his book, *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius filled this little book with those things that he found useful in his own personal life and spiritual journey so that those who go through these spiritual exercises might also make the experiences of Ignatius their own (cf. *Testament* 99).

Ignatius' insights come from a series of mystical experiences of God through which he grew both spiritually and psychologically. One of these occurred at La Storta, in a little chapel a few miles outside Rome. In this experience Ignatius had a vision of God the Father addressing the Son with the words, "I want you to take this man as your companion." And Jesus turned to Ignatius and said, "I want you to serve us." Ignatius referred to this experience as being "placed with the Son" (*Testament* 96).

As divine heirs, we receive the gifts
and graces of God, not as a privilege
but as a right.

When we reflect on the effect that being “placed with the Son” had on Ignatius, it seems to be very similar to St. Paul’s call to put on the mind of Christ, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave or free, male or female (Galatians 3:28). The psychological implication we can draw from Paul’s experience is that we can only love a person when we go beyond the other person’s gender, religion and state of life. In short, we need to go beyond an individual’s external attributes or labels and experience the core in order to relate to the other person and love him or her. This principle of going beyond externals also applies to our relationship with the Divine.

In his La Storta experience, Ignatius puts on the consciousness of Christ. As a child of God, Ignatius experiences himself as a divine heir (cf. Romans 8:17). Paul tells us that the Spirit enables us to call God “Abba Father.” So, if God is our Father then we are children of God, and if we are children of God, then, according to Paul’s tremendous insight, we are also divine heirs! As divine heirs, we receive the gifts and graces of God, not as a privilege but as a right.

What we can learn from the psychological insight of Ignatius’ La Storta experience is that we discover our true selves and our real identity as divine heirs. This experience deepens when the Son places Ignatius in the Trinity (*Spiritual Journal*, February 27, 1544). And a little later on he experiences the deepest union with the very being and essence of the Divine (*Spiritual Journal*, March 6). This union became the goal of his spiritual pathway and the gift he offers others in his Spiritual Exercises, namely, the deepest possible union and familiarity with the Divine “as rays of the sun and the sun, the waters of the fountain and the fountain”

(*Exercises* 237 and *Constitutions* 723). This goal is the same as Carl Jung’s goal of experiencing our relationship with the Infinite.

The psychological effect of this growing into the Divine Essence is reflected in what Ignatius will write in the *Spiritual Exercises*: “Those who live the spiritual life more deeply and truly will constantly meditate and contemplate how God our Lord is present in every creature with his power, presence and essence” (*Exercises* 39). One who grows into this relationship will now experience the interconnectedness of all of life. Whatever happens to one person will affect not only the whole of humanity but the whole of creation.

THREE STAGES OF IGNATIUS’ GROWTH

Ignatius’ spiritual state and experience as described in his writings reflect the three stages of his own psychological growth. In the first stage that Ignatius shares with us in his autobiography, he lives for God. During this period he imitates the saints in expressing his love for God. He imitates the saints without integrating their inner spirit and relationship with the Divine. This leads to psychological disintegration and real temptations to suicide. During this stage, Ignatius is leading God; he is directing his own journey through life. When he is left empty, frustrated and ready to give up on life he allows God and life to direct him, and then everything changes. “At this time,” Ignatius tells us, “God was leading me like a school teacher leads a student” (*Testament* 27). Once Ignatius allows God and life to take over he begins to experience life’s deeper meaning and the direction and purpose of his own life.

In the second stage, Ignatius now lives with God. During this period Ignatius gives up control over his life and allows God to direct him. He allows the spirit to flow through him and life happen to him. His deep spiritual experiences culminate into his becoming a new person with insights into both things spiritual and those of human nature (*Testament* 30). He goes as a pilgrim to Jerusalem to make the heart and spirit of Emmanuel, God with us, his very own. Even though his external decisions are not always the right ones, his heart is at peace and his spirit ever alive.

In the third phase of his journey, Ignatius finds himself in God, in the very being and essence of the

Divine. From this time on until his death Ignatius experiences tremendous inner tranquillity and deals with life's situations with freedom and equanimity. In his final phase of his life, Ignatius experiences a great inner balance and freedom in the face of poverty or riches, health or sickness, a long life or a short one (*Exercises* 23). He is rooted and grounded in the very essence of the Divine.

These experiences of Ignatius lay out for us a pattern that we can use in our own spiritual and psychological growth.

THE JOURNEY TO THE TRUE SELF

Karl Rahner said emphatically that the future Christian is either a mystic or nothing at all. This insight is a key to a fruitful comparison of the insights of Carl Jung's psychology and of Ignatius of Loyola's mystical experiences and spiritual pathway.

Mysticism belongs to what Jung calls feminine energy; this energy is intuitive, which means it goes beyond the mind and the five senses. In her article "Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche" (1956), Toni Wolff, Jung's closest associate, describes the feminine journey very insightfully as divisible into segments characterized by the predominance of one of four archetypes: the Mother, the Warrior, the Lover, and the Magician (or Mystic). This feminine journey offers a pathway to our true self and the essence of life. We shall see how a person develops this feminine energy in Jung's psychology and also in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises.

THE MOTHER

A person's life begins with a nurturing relationship with his or her mother. It is this relationship that is the foundation of all his or her future relationships with people and with life itself. Ignatius' series of spiritual exercises begin with the Principle and Foundation, which states: "Humans are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord and by means of doing this to save their souls" (*Exercises* 23). This Principle and Foundation is the beginning of a nurturing relationship with God, a life-giving foundation that will continue to influence all the other relationships in a person's life.

In his writings Ignatius will use the rhetorical device of doublets or triplets to explain the same

Service does not entail doing great things for God but being in an ever deeper relationship with the Divine.

reality in different ways. And so what does he mean by "the praise, reverence and service of God our Lord" (*Exercises* 23)? We will explore this triplet at the heart of the Principle and Foundation in the reverse order that Ignatius uses. We begin with service.

Service

The three stages of Ignatian spiritual growth—living for, with, and in God—are reflected in the Spiritual Exercises and in his understanding of service. In his autobiography, Ignatius describes the significant mystical experiences that he had in the little chapel at La Storta. When he entered this chapel, he had a landmark vision. In this vision he says, he saw God the Father addressing Jesus carrying the cross with these words, "I want you to take this man as your *companion*." And he saw Jesus turning to Ignatius and saying, "I want you to *serve* us." In this very simple but subtle exchange we are given a profound insight into the Ignatian concept of service, which does not entail *doing* great things for God but *being* in an ever deeper relationship with the Divine. Of course the test of this *being* in a relationship is the love that flows out into the world without keeping a record or counting the cost.

We see this same dynamic in the second insight, when we move from the first week of the Exercises to the second. We go through the first week of the Exercises against the background of Jesus on the cross. We move into the second week with the questions: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ? (*Exercises* 53). Ignatius intends this energy to find an outlet in the

Ignatius' focus is always on the need for our decisions to flow from our relationship with the Divine.

King Exercise which is often considered the second Principle and Foundation of the Exercises. In this exercise, Ignatius makes a fundamental correction. In the address of the temporal king to his followers Ignatius changes the expression “those who will work like me” (*trabajar como yo*) to “those who will work with me” (*trabajar conmigo*) (*Exercises* 93). This change clearly indicates that for Ignatius service of God is not in the *doing* (*trabajar como yo*) but in *being* in companionship and union with God (*trabajar conmigo*).

We see the third insight into Ignatius' understanding of service when we look at the goal of Ignatian discernment. Ignatius states clearly that the goal of discernment is not to find God's will in our lives nor to find out what I need to do, but to deepen my relationship with the Divine. Ignatius says that in discernment “the eye of our intention ought to be *single*. I ought to focus *only* on the purpose for which I have been created, to praise God our Lord and to save my soul” (*Exercises* 169 [emphasis added]). Our decisions will flow from our relationship with the Divine. And sometimes these sincere decisions may not always be what God wants us to do, but as long as our relationship with the Divine keeps deepening and growing, we achieve the goal of the Ignatian discernment.

Let us recall just one instant in the life of Ignatius. While he was at Manresa, Ignatius had many mystical experiences. It was here that he had an inner understanding of the Trinity, the humanity of Jesus and Mary, and insight into the Eucharist and creation. It was at Manresa, Ignatius tells us, that “the eyes of his understanding began to be opened ... and this with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to

him” (*Testament* 30). Ignatius felt as if he were another man with another mind. Now after these tremendous mystical experiences, Ignatius decided that God's will for his life was to go to Jerusalem, to live there and to die there. When we look at the life of Ignatius, we know for certain that this was not God's will for him. But we are sure that this sincere decision flowed from and deepened his relationship with the Divine.

Ignatius' understanding of service is based on very sound psychological principles. His focus is always on the need for our decisions to flow from our relationship with the Divine. The challenge we face can be compared to the experience of some married couples. In a marriage relationship a couple makes vows to love each other totally and unconditionally until death. In a sense they do not make a vow to love their children. Of course true love of the couple overflows in their love for their children. But it does not work the other way around. The mistake that some couples make is not realizing that when the children are born, their attention shifts from one another to the children. To some degree and in some subtle, unconscious way, one spouse feels neglected, and soon the children become a bone of contention or an object of competition in the relationship. And when the children grow up and leave the house these husbands and wives look at each other as strangers. This is what happens when our service remains at the level of working for God and does not progress to working with and in God. Those who sacrifice their entire lives for God's children may wake up one day and be unable to recognize God anymore.

Reverence

Ignatius also refers to *reverence* in the Principle and Foundation. This word in Ignatius' Spanish is *acatamiento*, which is emptying self of self in order to be filled with the Divine Self. Ignatius' concept of reverence is one of warm affection and surging emotion (*Exercises* 60) that draws a person into union and communion with the Divine at the deepest possible level. In his *Spiritual Journal*, Ignatius will write about how he felt his body temperature changing, his hair standing on end and losing his power of speech whenever he was drawn through reverence into a deeper relationship with the Divine.

For Ignatius, reverence, like service, is both the goal of our lives and the means to attain our salvation.

Ignatius teaches us to pause before we begin our prayer, become aware of the presence of God and enter fully the mystery we are contemplating with reverence (*Exercises* 75). We allow ourselves to become an integral part of the mystery just as if we were there, "with all possible devotion and reverence" (*Exercises* 114) until we find ourselves in the mystery we are contemplating (*Exercises* 206). Ignatius wants this reverential involvement to transform us into the mystery we are contemplating. This is indicated by his repeated instruction "*reflectir en mi mismo*," meaning "to allow myself to be absorbed into the mystery. The process of absorption climaxes in the Contemplation to Attain Love, where Ignatius insists that love is shown more in deeds than in words and immediately goes on to explain what these deeds are (*Exercises* 230). It is a mutual outpouring of self in the relationship between the Lover and the beloved, between the Divine and the individual person until that person is fully assimilated into the Divine "like the rays of the sun and the sun and the waters of the fountain and the fountain" (*Exercises* 237).

After the experience of the Contemplation to Attain Love the retreatants, like Ignatius, are now disposed "to encounter God in all things" (*Testament* 99). The reverence that individuals experience in their relationship with God overflows into their relationships with other people, their work and the whole of creation. Every creature and every human-being is approached with love and care with the awareness that they "all come from God, go back to God and are in God" (cf. *Testament* 29). God dwells in every part of creation, thereby making it his temple, since everything is created as a likeness and image of the Divine Majesty (*Exercises* 235). Not only does God dwell in creation but God also "labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth" (*Exercises* 236), perfecting the temple of God and the image and likeness of the Divine Majesty. The whole universe becomes the Divine Milieu for Teilhard de Chardin and, as Gerard Manley Hopkins states, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God."

The mystical journal that Ignatius maintained during the last phase of his life indicates that his experience of reverence had become second nature and a way of life for him. Ignatius considered reverence to be so important that he writes in that spiritual journal on March 14, 1544, "I was persuaded that a

To praise, reverence and serve God, then, is to be drawn into a nurturing and intimate union with the Divine.

higher value was placed on this grace and knowledge [of reverence] for the spiritual advantage of my soul, than on *all* those that went before" (emphasis added). Therefore, if there is one attitude that we need to have in life, it is that of reverence—reverence that seeks union with all of life and fosters wholeness and harmony.

Praise

Lastly, Ignatius' Principle and Foundation tells us that we are created to *praise* God our Lord. Psalm 8 helps us to understand what the Ignatian concept of praise is. As expounded in this psalm, the majesty and grandeur of the Divine elicit spontaneous praise from humans. This praise "foils the enemies" and "silences the foe and the rebel." True praise comes from an intimate relationship that overshadows enemies. In this relationship of praise, humans are made little less than gods. They are crowned with glory and honor and have dominion over all of God's creation.

The Principle and Foundation functions as a beginning, an initial guide for entering into a nourishing, mother-child relationship with God. To praise, reverence and serve God, then, is to be drawn into a nurturing and intimate union with the Divine. This intimacy in turn affects how we experience ourselves and how we relate to all of life. This is an experience of freedom, harmony and wholeness.

THE WARRIOR

Having established this Mother-relationship as the foundation of our lives, we now move on to the second segment of the feminine journey, which Wolff

For Ignatius, then, sin is not something that we do, but rather, a breach in our relationship with the Divine.

characterizes by the archetype of the Warrior. At this stage, we move out to slay dragons and rescue those in distress. We now want to express the love relationship in reaching out to fight against unjust structures and take care of those who are in need. "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me" (Matthew 25:40) now becomes our motto for our new way of life.

In the first week of the Ignatian Exercises, the Warrior does not continue to go out into the world, but must turn inward. The Warrior is invited to think about sin, which breaks the Mother-relationship. Ignatius brings this sinner not to the court of justice but to the court of honor (*Exercises* 74) and offers different ways to come back and strengthen this relationship. In the court of honor, the sinner is like a knight who feels deep shame and confusion after grievously offending his king, one from whom he has received numerous gifts and honors (*Exercises* 48; 74)—shame for what he has done to break this wonderful relationship and confusion because he is not punished. Ignatius is struggling to get the sinner to mend the broken Mother-relationship and deepen it.

For Ignatius, then, sin is not something that we do, but rather, a breach in our relationship with the Divine. Ignatius wants to help us in our Mother-relationship by showing us how to get to the root of our sinfulness. He wants us to go over our lives year by year, period by period, through the different places we have lived, the relationships we have been in and the works we have done, and find a pattern (*Exercises* 56), a pattern that can make or break our relationship—this

is our root sin and our root grace. It is in our root sin that we will find our root grace. It is the energy from that same pattern that can flow either way. In the life of Ignatius, we see that it is in his *vainglory*, his root sin, that he finds the energy of the Ever Greater *Glory* of God, his root grace. We find the climax of the first week of the Spiritual Exercises in an exclamation of wonder and a surge of emotions when we realize not only that we are not punished, but also that those whom we have offended continue to be a Mother to us and reach out to deepen our relationship (*Exercises* 60). It is at this point that the Warrior and the Mother are reconciled. The initiative in this process is always from God who draws the retreatant into an ever deeper relationship with the Divine. The effect of this reconciliation overflows into the way the retreatant will live out his or her life.

THE LOVER

Having mended and deepened the Mother-relationship, the Warrior now passes on to the segment of the journey characterized by the archetype of the Lover. This is the return of the prodigal son, the person who has the courage to celebrate with the one he has offended. The Lover will accept self and others with both strengths and weaknesses. The Lover is now at home and settled in all relationships.

In the Exercises, the retreatant who comes from the journey of the first week will now strive to gain intimate knowledge, intense love and close following of Our Lord (*Exercises* 104). The prayer experience is now contemplation, which is a natural prayer of the Lover. In Ignatian contemplation, the retreatant opens himself or herself to the mystery that is being contemplated and allows that mystery to fill and transform the self into the mystery. The fruit of this prayer is attained when the Lover experiences spiritual repose and is at peace with the beloved. It is from this place of repose and equilibrium that an Ignatian apostle will be a witness to the Divine presence in this world. Through a variety of ministries and works (*trabajar comigo*) the Ignatian follower also will draw the world to experience and find spiritual repose in an ever deepening relationship with the Divine.

In the third week of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius leads the archetypal Lover from the tranquil hidden and public life of Jesus through the pain of the Passion. In this week the Lover becomes one with the heart and the spirit of the beloved as the beloved goes through his passion and death on the cross. The Lover is like the three Marys—Mary, the mother of Jesus; her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene—*standing at the foot of the cross*. The Lover's heart may break with life's excruciatingly painful experiences, but his or her inner spirit experiences spiritual repose and is always at peace and strong. The Lover lives in eternal hope because the Lover believes in *life, life* that is *sanatana*, (Sanskrit for “no beginning and no end”), *life* that is eternal in the now.

THE MAGICIAN

This Lover now is ready to live the life of the Magician. For the Magician all of life is now a gift. The energy of the universe flows through all life—through health or sickness, riches or poverty, honor or dishonor, a long life or a short one (cf. *Exercises* 23). The Contemplation to Attain Love (*Exercises* 230–237) becomes for the Magician a way of life in which s/he comes to see every gift as God's dwelling place and in which God strives to transform every gift into the divine. It is in this experience that the Magician within Ignatius melds into the Divine “like the rays of the sun and the sun, the waters of the fountain and the fountain” (*Exercises* 237). Ignatius tells us that the Magician will constantly meditate and contemplate now God our Lord is present *in every creature* by his power, presence and essence (*Exercises* 39). The Magician is now co-mingled with the Divine and “inflamed with the love of its Creator and Lord. As a result it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all” (*Exercises* 316).

PSYCHOLOGICAL HELPS

Dispositions for Personal Growth

Ignatius offers various forms of psychological help to anyone who wants to make the *Spiritual Exercises* a

Ignatius exhorts us to enter into life with an animated and enthusiastic spirit.

way of life. The first of these is to have the right and proper dispositions. We find this suggestion in his book *Spiritual Exercises* in the section called the fifth annotation. Here, Ignatius exhorts us to enter into life with an animated and enthusiastic spirit (*grande animo*) and to offer ourselves willingly to the Creator and Lord so that the Divine Majesty may make use of us and all we have according to God's most holy will. In other words, we have to open ourselves to the gift of the universe and allow the energy of the universe to flow in and through us until we become one with this spiritual and divine energy.

This disposition that Ignatius would want us to make our own is like that of Mary in the Gospel. At the Annunciation her response was not a “yes” or a “no” but rather “let life happen to me according to God's word.” She opened herself to the flow of life. Later when she realized that she was with child, she could have chosen to be afraid of rejection by her spouse Joseph, because her child would not be his, or fearful of public stoning according to the Mosaic Law. Instead her response was “let life happen to me according to God's word.” Mary allowed herself to experience the “hosanna” and the “crucify him” moments of her life. She did not cling to one or the other, but flowed with every moment, the sweet and the torment. She always lived the fullness of life.

Another one of Ignatius' effective approaches to life is found in the principle of adaptation. This means that, in our own spiritual path and growth we must continue to move with God—wherever God leads us—and to let God lead us out of our comfort zone to

In the desert, we experience life and
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and transparency.

see if we will fly. And it means trusting that, if we fall, we will not have to stand up alone. This principle of adaptation is also useful to us if we work as a spiritual advisor or director. Ignatius advises that we adapt our approach to a person's age, education and ability. And then, after we meet people where they are, Ignatius wants us to stretch them as much as is possible. However, if a person does not want to be stretched, Ignatius advises that we question whether it is profitable to continue working with that person because there is not enough time to do everything and there are likely others who would profit more from our ministry (*Exercises* 18).

This leads us to consider two dispositions that are *not* helpful or healthy, two negative dispositions in the spiritual or the psychological life. The first is the disposition of people who go through life without expecting great things to happen but are satisfied with merely achieving some good. These people are satisfied with the crumbs and the leftovers that may fall from God and life. Those people who at some point refuse to be stretched and who refuse to adapt and grow in God, are often those who would go through life expecting "some good." This attitude becomes an obstacle to God who wants to work wonders in and through us and who wants to draw every human being and all of life into the Divine Self (*Exercises* 230-237).

The second of these negative dispositions is a misguided generosity. People with this disposition go through life driven by their inner maxim, "I want to do something big for God in this life." These people have the right intention, but *they* want to do it *their*

way. This is very limiting and self-defeating. While they are very self-sacrificing and martyr themselves for life's causes, they pay a big price and sooner or later they feel frustrated and begin to give up on life and on themselves.

Through those positive psychological dispositions mentioned above—openness and availability—Ignatius wants us to open ourselves to God and flow with the energy of life and the universe. Just like Abraham we are invited to let go of our land, our family, our culture and our gods and to look for the land flowing with milk and honey. But this path will always take us through the desert. And in the desert we are alone with no road maps and no traditional paths. We are stripped of all the securities that we found in our family tradition and even in our social and religious structures. In the desert, we experience life and ourselves in all their nakedness and transparency. We are finally invited to sacrifice our Isaacs—God's most sacred gifts. We let go of everything and flow ever deeper with the energy of the universe and the Divine.

Prayer

To help us attain this tremendous gift, Ignatius offers us his style of praying, a style which becomes a way of life. For Ignatius, prayer is not an end in itself, but a means of attaining the goal of life. In the first stage of learning to pray he teaches us a form of prayer called meditation, which is a mental exercise in which we use our memory, understanding and will. We gain insights into the mysteries of life and make resolutions to make the best and the most of the life that we live. At this stage our psychological life is very mechanical even though it is rational and very logical.

In the next stage of prayer, Ignatius introduces us to contemplation. In this form of prayer, we open ourselves to the mystery we are contemplating and allow that mystery to fill us and transform us into that very mystery. We become what we contemplate. At this stage, our psychological life is on the affective level. We open ourselves to every moment of the mystery of our lives and look at each moment as a divine gift; each moment is also the divine dwelling place where the Divine is laboring to transform this moment into its divine and spiritual end. In so doing, we become contemplatives-in-action.

But the highest level that Ignatius leads us to is the prayer of consciousness or the application of the senses, which becomes our way of life. This is a prayer that teaches us to be fully aware of the Divine presence without any selfish interest. We are present not only with our intellect but with our whole being, with all of our senses. This is what Ignatius experienced at the end of his life—an abiding Divine presence at every moment of his life and the reason why his companions would call him a contemplative-in-action. The experience of the application of senses is the same as that of a person with a cobra. In the presence of this poisonous snake that can strike the person dead, that person is fully *I-Now-Here*. This *I* is not affected by the positive and negative things of life. This *I* is the image and likeness of God and the Divine breath. This *I* is totally free. Living in the *Now* helps the person to live in eternal time because *Now* is part of every moment from the beginning of time; *Now* is part of every moment till the end of time. Similarly, to live fully in the *Here* is to become a part of everywhere.

This is a very therapeutic way of living life because, if we examine our day, we will find very few moments that are actually ridden with negative or destructive moments; we either bring guilt from the past or anxiety about the future into the present. If we live fully in the *I-Now-Here* we will begin to live the fullness of life in peace and freedom.

CONCLUSION

Going through the Spiritual Exercises, we find ourselves on a mystical journey toward greater intimacy and oneness with the Infinite, the Divine. With the helpful psychological suggestions that Ignatius offers, we can move along the pathway toward psychological wholeness and find greater clarity, through our relationship with the Divine, about the meaning and purpose of our life. Once we discover the meaning of our lives, then Ignatius wants us to let that be the foundation of all the graces we will receive. This

meaning will give authority and authenticity to all that we do and all the life that we live. In times of crisis, it will help us stay whole and not lose our inner peace and freedom. This meaning will be the message of our lives and the legacy we leave behind.

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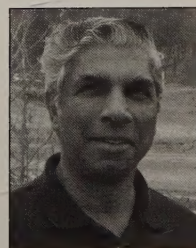
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A Giraffe Inside My Van

Margaret Cessna, H.M.

The giraffe could have killed me and hurt herself. It would have been my fault. But, instead, I got my hand licked with her long purple/black tongue. I whispered into her ear as I stroked her broad and muscular neck. I tried to breathe as thinly as possible so that she would not detect a movement that could have signaled threat.

After a short time, I decided to usher the head and neck of this magnificent animal out of the front seat of my van the same way that she got in. I very slowly reached to my right as Rose handed me the bucket of animal food that I had given to her a few minutes before to feed the other giraffe outside of her window. The giraffe had come into the van in pursuit of the food that she had been enjoying outside my window. I moved the bucket an inch at a time while the giraffe continued to feed. She moved backward along with the bucket until they both were once again outside my window. It ended as it had begun. Peacefully and gracefully.

I can't stop thinking about this encounter. It left a mark of awe and gratitude on my spirit. And I wonder how the lesson from this giraffe could apply to other perceived threats. Strangely, I was not afraid, but at the same time I was aware that both Rose and I could be in danger. In danger because I took the bucket of food away so that the animal on the other side of the van could be fed. I took her food away. As soon as she made contact with the bucket again, she seemed satisfied. As she continued to feed, I strained to hear if she would purr. Nothing there. Just happy chomping.

Let me recap. There was a giraffe in my van. She seemed relaxed. Neither Rose nor I were in a panic. To any onlooker, it would have appeared that we were old pals and that the giraffe had come to the van for her regular afternoon feeding. There was a strange form of harmony going on. We had what she needed. She wanted it and we gave it to her. Happy ending. End of story. Or is it?

Was the happy ending because no harm was intended from either party? In a larger context, does it demonstrate that when you share what you have, others do not have to harm you or kill you to get what they need?

What would I do if someone threatened to take my food away if it were all I had with no chance of getting any more? I don't know. I just do not know what I would do. I am too blessed to even imagine it. What would any mother or father do if someone took away food meant for their children? What if everyone had enough to eat without fearing the theft of food, or home, or clothing. Or medicine?

How thinly would I breathe if there were a predator at my door? How thinly would I breathe if threats to my life and culture were real? How long could I hold my breath if gunmen were in the neighborhood? Or on my porch? I cannot imagine how I would breathe or not breathe. It has never happened to me. But it has happened. I read about it. I see it on the news. Bad things happen to good people. It happens to families. It happens to children. It often happens when people do not have what they need.

I treasure my experience with the giraffe. It put me skin close to a marvelous creature that I had no right to touch. That had no right being inside my van. But there she was. And there I was. And I want to learn something here because I believe that animals have so much to teach me. To teach all of us. They can't talk. But we can listen. And think. And observe. And wonder.

I fed the giraffe and she was content. What else, who else, is so skin-close to me that I can reach out and touch? Touch with an intention that will lead to contentment. If I could touch and feed, if we all could touch and feed, those who are hungry, "What a Wonderful World" could become the new international anthem. Why not?

We can act with intention and will. Perhaps if everyone had the chance to hug a gentle giraffe's neck and to be soothed by a purple/black tongue the world would be a better place. With "trees of green, skies of blue, and clouds of white. With bright blessed days and dark sacred nights."*

In the meantime, I must search for a way to translate that stunning moment into behavior that will help to feed and heal and serve. If there are enough people to work at it, we might someday be able to hear the whole world purr with contentment. As we watch "babies grow" and sing together, "what a wonderful world."

*"What a Wonderful World," George D. Weiss and Bob Thiele, 1967.



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